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The Global Dystopian: Twenty-First Century Globalization, Terrorism, and Urban Destruction

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE GLOBAL DYSTOPIAN: TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY GLOBALIZATION,

TERRORISM, AND URBAN DESTRUCTION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The start of the new millennium has seen a staggering outpouring of literature, film and art depicting dystopian and post-apocalyptic societies. Previously relegated to less prominent and critically-acclaimed genres like science fiction and fantasy, contemporary dystopian stories have come in the form of massively popular films like the *Matrix, Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies; Emmy-winning comic-to-television adaptations such as *The Walking Dead*; and Pulitzer Prize-winning novels like Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, or Kasho Ishiguro's Booker Prize-nominated *Never Let Me Go.* In 2010, Paolo Baccigalupi's post-apocalyptic novel *Ship Breaker* was among the first finalists nominated for the National Book Award in young people's literature. In the last five years, a wave of critically-lauded video games—*The Last of Us* (2013), *Bioshock Infinite* (2013) and *Dishonored* (2012) come immediately to mind—have depicted dystopian worlds while reaching mass audiences. Combined, *The Last of Us* and *Bioshock Infinite* sold over 12 million copies in 2013 alone (Ledford). These titles alone represent the variety of mediums and genres that dystopian stories can inhabit, and their combination of award recognition and popularity speaks to their burgeoning cultural significance. In *Wastelands: Stories of the Apocalypse,* John Joseph Adams notes that dystopian stories went through an early cycle of cultural prominence in the Western reading world after WWII; popularity forged in the shadow of the twin horrors of the

Hydrogen Bomb and the Nazi Holocaust. That national popularity and fascination waned as the Cold War drew to a close, but reemerged again in the mid-to-late nineties, first in film and young adult fiction, and then later in popular adult literature. Adams wonders if the current resurgence is connected to widespread global conflict: "Is it because the political climate now is reminiscent of the climate during the Cold War? During times of war and global unease, is it that much easier to imagine a depopulated world, a world destroyed by humanity's own hand?" (2).

While I agree that a kind of "global unease" is central to the re-emergence of fiction that depicts widespread violence, destruction, disease and political strife, the truth is that the international political climate resembles very little of the Cold War.[1] Rather than a long-simmering conflict between established nations with legacies of military and economic might, the contemporary global community is more frequently defined by amorphous entities. International corporations, global community organizations and groups of non-state actors both engage and defy nation-state governments, while individuals, corporations and states all participate in an expansive and complex global economy. In this project, I argue that the antagonisms that arise from these transnational exchanges are both the subject and the modus operandi for dystopian stories which analyze, and are influenced by, terrorism and events of mass destruction. This dissertation looks to the myriad ways that contemporary dystopian fear is woven into a global culture in which terrorism, biological warfare and scarcity of natural resources coalesce to create cultures of anxiety and paranoia that exist alongside more

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[1]Our newly-emerged standoff with Russia over the Crimea and the economic identity of the Ukraine notwithstanding.

cosmopolitan conceptions of globalization.

To understand the contemporary proliferation of dystopian stories, the genre itself needs to be contextualized within the synchronal rise of globalization. As I have noted, John Joseph Adams argues that the mid-Twentieth Century popularity of dystopian fiction reflects a post-World War II culture of paranoia that flourished during the Cold War. The impact of World War II—its endless, ruthlessly mechanized and streamlined butchery—and the Superpower nuclear standoff its ending engendered on the popularity of dystopian and apocalyptic fiction cannot be overstated. The best way to understand the contemporary popularity and significance of dystopian fiction is to first contextualize it within the history of early Twentieth Century transatlantic travel and communication, and then the transnationalism and technology that drives Twenty-First Century globalization. In doing so, the following chapters use these epochs of recent history as markers in the expansion of the long historical process of globalization, and contend that the major cultural traumas and anxieties described in modern dystopian works align with shifts and growths in globalization. In short, this project will show that dystopian anxieties are interwoven with the rise of globalization. In what follows, I begin with an overview of the historical antecedents of contemporary dystopian literature and theory. The simultaneous rise of transatlantic Modernism and the modern city sewed a cynicism and wariness among a segment of Modernist writers and artists. Walter Benjamin, James Joyce and other Modernist writers gave rise to many major Twentieth Century cultural critics – from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkiemer to Frederic Jameson – who developed a variety of theories which, I argue, navigate the basic premise of dystopian

theory: disillusionment and the loss of hope in a technologically advanced, mechanized society.

Transnational Cities and Modern Dystopias

The force of modern globalization and the presence of dystopian energies in contemporary fiction need to be understood within the framework of Modernity and the manner in which it coincides with the rise of the modern city. Charles Baudelaire is thought to be the first poet to use the term "Modern" to describe the experience of industrialized, urban living, but using his works as a starting point can date the field all the way back to near 1840, which makes it so large as to be nearly meaningless as a descriptor.[2] I take Modernism to demarcate the 35-plus year period between 1900 and the start of WWII in 1938. This locates the field as a successor to the Victorian Era, and situates it at a time in which many metropolises across the Atlantic were encountering new technologies of travel, mass communication and industrialization. Carl Sandburg's 1920 poem "Manual System" speaks directly to this confluence of communication and technology:

> Mary has a thingamajig clamped on her ears
> And sits all day taking plugs out and sticking plugs in.
> Flashes and flashes—voices and voices calling for ears to put words in
> Faces at the ends of wires asking for other faces at the ends of other wires:
> All day taking plugs out and sticking plugs in,
> Mary has a thingamajig clamped on her ears.

Mary, who works as a telephone operator, has a "thingamajig clamped on her ears" (1) as she connects people to one another, people who are conceived as "Faces at the ends of wires asking for other faces / at the ends of other wires" (5-6). The poem is significant

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[2]See Baudelaire's "Painter of Modern Life" essay in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, edited and translated by Jonathan Mayne. London: Phaidon Press, 13.

because in but a few brief lines Sandburg highlights the way a variety of forces worked in concursion to cross borders—literal and cultural – during the transatlantic Modern period. As her name implies, the main character of the poem is a woman, and a working woman at that. Like many women in the Modern period, Mary has moved into the working world, a precursor to the great influx of women into the U.S. workforce during World War II. And yet Mary isn't just working, *she's working with new technology*. "All day" long she is able to connect people to one another through the relatively new technology of the phone. So vital and important was this kind of new technology within the period that it literally becomes blended into the fabric of humanity: the wires connecting people are plugged directly into human faces, so that technology and humanity becomes a nearly homogenous unit. And the image we are left with is one of Mary as a type of motor or bridge, the person who keeps the mechanized human beings in contact with one another. In this sense, Sandburg positions *newness* (in technology, constructions of gender, and a variety of other domains) as the engine of the Modern period, the thing that binds together and animates a world that is often understood to have been defined by its traversing of new borders and new identities through the use of advancing technology.

Though unspoken, it is almost certainly true that the scene conceived by Sandburg would have taken place in a call center in an urban setting, as large cities were hubs for the transnational processes of communication and travel that developed during the Modern period. The end of the Civil War impelled a massive relocation of the United States' population from rural to urban locations. In 1860, only 16 American cities had a population greater than 50,000; by 1900, the population in 38 U.S. cities totaled more

than 100,000 inhabitants. By 1920, the 20 largest cities in the U.S. each had a population

over 300,000, with Chicago at over two million and New York at over five million

residents (U.S. Census). As nearly 24 million people migrated into urban spaces in the

forty years after the Civil War, cities grew both upward and outward ("The Rise of the

Modern City"). At the turn of the Twentieth Century, urban spaces were becoming

preeminent centers of commerce and congregation, and were coupled with a series of

technological innovations, from radio-wave technology, to the telephone system

described in Sandburg's poem, to film (Cuddy-Keane). Maxwell Garnnett, then Secretary

of the League of Nations, wrote in 1924 that: "The United States are, in effect, nearer to

London than Scotland was one hundred years ago. The developments of science are

welding the world into a whole, whether its people wish it or not" (Cuddy-Keane).

Pamela Caughie argues that the Modern Period should be considered the start of

contemporary globalization:

> Modernism, with its emphasis on new technology, can now be seen as at least the
> inception of what we have come to call globalization. Globalization here refers to
> the swift dissemination of cultural products (e.g., music, literature, fashion)
> worldwide through the forces of mass culture such that the borders separating
> nations and geographic regions have become permeable and insecure. (372)[3]

And indeed, the era features a shrinking of geographical restrictions in a time of

advanced travel technology, and an emerging global culture based around movement and

communication originating in urban locations.

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[3]Roland Robertson (*Globalization*) and Paul Jay (*Global Matters*) both argue that globalization
has a long historical genesis that stretches well back to instances of European colonialism in the 17th and
18th Centuries. But Caughie's assertion is more a suggestion that the Modern period is the root of
contemporary globalization, and that its technological and industrial roots are still evident today.

The migration of vast numbers of people to cities is an essential feature of globalization, and the aesthetics of urbanization were central to Modernism. A number of Modern writers celebrated the city and the culture of urbane cosmopolitanism they perceived to be growing out of it. In *Writing the City*, Desmond Harding argues that for many writers, from antiquity to the Modern era, the city was defined by a binary relationship of "identity and structure" (21), with urban spaces providing sociological structure while housing and nurturing a diverse array of identities and cultures. The city is, at once, culturally knowable to its inhabitants (who assume its name—Chicagoan, New Yorker, Parisian—as both a marker of regionality and a badge of membership) and yet inscrutably sprawling and morphing, lending it a sense of amorphousness:

> In linguistic terms, it can be argued that the city defies any attempt to designate a "meaning," "signified," or "center," eliding its own signification at every turn. In Derridean terms, if the traditional functions of the city are now displaced to other parts of a more homogeneously urbanized environment (as has become the case, say with American "edge cities"), then the effect will resemble the loss of semantic apprehensibility. (22)

For many artists, the city's eliding of signification translated to endless possibility; a text to be continually interpreted and reinterpreted in the eye of an observer. Central to Baudelaire's construction of the term "Modernity" was the concept of the flâneur, the strolling urban observer. As he wrote in one of the more often-cited portions of *The Painter of Modern Life*:

> For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. […] Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of

its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.

Baudelaire composed *The Painter of Modern Life* in 1859, and by the high Modern period some 60 years later, technologies of communication afforded, to different degrees, the opportunity for society at large to function as a flâneur in a transcultural exchange.

In *Reading 1922*, Michael North discusses the world voyages of major artists like Claude McKay and Charlie Chaplin (who detailed his travels in *My Trip Abroad*), arguing that the position of the flâneur was alive and well in the Modern period. But just as significantly, North suggests that the advent of national media forces like the BBC offered a transcultural veneer to society, connecting even peoples whose lives did not involve direct access to travel and offering the masses access to the media's roving, observing eye (16). This line of thinking is later echoed in Arjun Appadurai's concepts of a *mediascapes* and *ethnoscapes*.[4] Appadurai argues that globalization constitutes landscapes of people who comprise the shifting world in which we live; tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups of persons. The *mediascape* is a kind of portal into and out of which visual cultural information travels. For Appadurai, who is a critic of globalization and not Modernist scholar, these *scapes* are a way to conceptualize fluidity in media and migration. North suggests that these media portals blossomed in the Modernist period, forcing audiences to be more aware of the diversity of the human experience; asking Modern audiences to view themselves and their culture as contextual, not universal, with the media as an interlocutor (110). By "contextual," North means the antithesis of the Arnoldian ideal; rather than understanding

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[4]See Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996). I discuss Appadurai's work in much greater detail in the next chapter of this project.

their culture as omnipresent and their belief systems as universal, Modern audiences were forced by the mass media to understand their lifestyles as situated and mediated by a number of factors, including location, politics, class and race.

Edward Cutler suggests the self-awareness of Modern audiences was mirrored by a reflexivity in Modernist mass media. He argues that the daily newspaper of the time was a deviation from previous incarnations of "newspapers," which previously were printed political and religious pamphlets or tracts: purposefully biased and intended to persuade. Cutler notes that the daily newspaper, however, was intended to be "an ongoing and near synchronous representation of current events" (64) a fact which foregrounded the "present" moment and a reflexive acknowledgement of it as an important kind of "social knowing" (65). Cutler's views seem a natural companion to North's scholarship, together suggesting that transatlantic mass media forced Modernist audiences into a recognition of both their social contextualization and personal temporality. Not surprisingly, movement, migration and the media become significant themes for many Modernist writers during this period (John Dos Passos's *1919* and *42nd Parallel*, and D.H. Lawrence's *The Lost Girl* spring immediately to mind). Again, the city is a vital construct here, as its elided signification served as a perfect embodiment of transnational and transcultural relativity: the city was always shifting and forever changing.

But this largely celebratory view of the city, and its relationship to global cultural exchanges, was not without dissent. The great migration to urban hubs of travel and culture occurred against an aggressive backdrop of industrialization and congestion. Where many Modernists viewed the city as a cosmopolitan ideal, others came to see

urban life as thronged, emotionally isolating, and perhaps most importantly, infected.

Between 1850 and 1915, many large U.S. cities were plagued by outbreaks of

communicable diseases. In 1866, a cholera outbreak killed 990 people in Chicago ("Early

Cholera Outbreaks") and the disease was a major source of mortality in New York's Irish

and Italian immigrant communities ("Cholera in 1866"). Between 1890 and 1893 a

typhoid epidemic in Chicago accounted for 7% of the city's total mortality rate.

Localized typhoid epidemics in New York in 1906 and 1915 were preludes to the global

Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, which killed upwards of 40 million people

and reduced the global life expectancy rate by nearly a decade (Billings). The virus, now

recognized as a type of Avian flu, likely originated in China and spread from military

trenches in Europe as World War I wound to a close to port cities along trade and travel

routes like New York, Boston, Paris, London and Sierra Leone (Billings). The movement

of the Spanish Influenza is eerily similar to Jack London's remarkably prescient *The

Scarlet Plague*, published in 1912 and set in 2073. In London's novella, an elderly man

tells the story of a global epidemic in the year 2013, which manifests like a kind of a flu –

including a scarlet rash – and kills within an hour of infection. It is almost stunning to

read London's story, both because of how well it would fit in with contemporary popular

fiction, and because even in 1912 it is already adopting a globalized identity. The disease

is first reported in New York, but spreads rapidly through each major American city

along a port or a train line:

> we talked through the air in those days, thousands and thousands of miles. And
> the word came of a strange disease that had broken out in New York. There were
> seventeen millions of people living then in that noblest city of America. Nobody
> thought anything about the news. It was only a small thing. There had been only a

> few deaths. It seemed, though, that they had died very quickly, and that one of the first signs of the disease was the turning red of the face and all the body. Within twenty-four hours came the report of the first case in Chicago. And on the same day, it was made public that London, the greatest city in the world, next to Chicago, had been secretly fighting the plague for two weeks and censoring the news despatches [sic]. (Section I)

Notice the connection London makes between New York's status as "that noblest city of America" and its imagined population of "seventeen millions of people."[5] The implication being that New York's standing as a world city – the equal of London in the New World – is intimately affixed to its growth and density. And indeed that density is identified as the Scarlet Plague's primary mode of transmission:

> In spite of all these diseases, and of all the new ones that continued to arise, there were more and more men in the world. This was because it was easy to get food. The easier it was to get food, the more men there were; the more men there were, the more thickly were they packed together on the earth; and the more thickly they were packed, the more new kinds of germs became diseases. (Section I)

Meanwhile, the mass exodus of millions from infected areas becomes a major consequence of the epidemic, and the primary mechanism by which looting, riots and class violence (London was a committed Socialist whose work frequently reflected the gilding of the Reconstruction Era) overtake the United States.

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[5]The actual population of New York City is roughly half London's estimate. The Census Bureau report from July 2013 estimates 8,405, 837 inhabitants in the city proper. If the metropolitan area is included, then the estimated polulation for New York City in 2013 balloons to 19.3 million, making London's prediction surprisingly accurate.

"POURING OUT OF THE CITY BY MILLIONS"

Figure 1. Gordan Grant's original illustrations for the 1915 edition of *The Scarlet Plague*

The Scarlet Plague sets a structure that will be replicated in dystopian and apocalyptic fiction produced in the early and mid-2000s: A major catastrophe strikes a metropolitan area; mass casualties ensue as urban life descends into chaos, and small bands of survivors flee the city in favor of sparsely populated rural and wooded area. This pattern, imagined by London in 1912, is reproduced in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), and Alfonso Cauron's *Children of Men* (2006), all of which are discussed in Chapter Two.

That industrializing hub cities could be seen as diseased and dangerous is hardly unchartered territory, and *The Scarlet Plague* is perhaps the most extreme example of dystopian Modernist literature. But it provides an important backdrop for a dimmer perception of urban living, one that views the city as a fetid place – where the sprawling slippage of signification which facilitates transcultural exchanges can also be re-imagined

as a diseased and dangerous impersonal force. Modernist writers explored urban

dystopias in less drastic terms than Jack London, though still within the context of the

intersection of global technologies and the growth of urban communities. While these

authors do not portray societies in the obvious physical or political disrepair of *The*

Scarlet Plague, they still illustrate communities faltering under dystopian impulses which

eliminate small communities, and replace them with large, potentially dangerous

collections of un-connected peoples and energies. During this period, critics viewed the

city as simultaneously advanced, progressive and global, and a chaotic, dangerous space

that unmoors its inhabitants from previous identities.

Walter Benjamin's writings after World War I lay the foundation for a dystopian[6]

view of Modernity that he later expands upon in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.

Jessica Berman notes that Benjamin's essay *The Storyteller* laments the loss of knowable

communities to the fragmentation of the modernizing transcontinental world:

> In the twentieth century […] social experience becomes fragmentary; the only
> community available seems to be the "community of speech […] Both Benjamin
> and Williams imagine community as the crucial link between speaker and listener
> and thus as the underlying condition of storytelling. Both Benjamin and Williams
> also imagine community as the realm in which narrative and history coincide, the
> realm in which past experiences in common make possible a shared linguistic
> meaning. And both see, in twentieth-century Europe, the problem of the loss of
> this realm of the knowable, a loss which becomes for them a key experience of
> the narratives of modernism. (2)

By "the loss of this realm of the knowable," Berman attributes the Modernist sense of

displacement and discontinuity not to a general experience of disillusionment, but to an

experience rooted in the loss of small, local communities. That isn't to say that Benjamin

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[6]A full definition and description of the term "dystopian," and my use of it in this project, follows shortly in this introduction.

was opposed to cosmopolitanism (he himself was quite cosmopolitan); rather, that in an

age of rapid industrialization and urbanization, he worried that the idea of community

was becoming abstracted. In the absence of shared experience, Benjamin argues that

there is no shared understanding – leaving only ignorance building toward disaster.

Benjamin's personal experience of terror and exile from the Third Reich only deepened

his suspicions, and concretized his belief that the combination of rapid globalization and

industrialization obscured individual identities and streamlined the processes of

oppression. In *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, he writes: "The tradition of the

oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception

but the rule. We attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight"

(257). Benjamin's description of a perpetual "state of emergency" is an expression of

dystopian thought: that in a fragmented and abstracted world, the past – and any wisdom

and foresight it might imbue through shared experience – rears its head only at the

moment it is too late to realize we're standing on the precipice of catastrophe:

> The true picture of the past flies by. The past can be seized only as an image
> which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again
> […] (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart
> may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth. (255)

For Benjamin, history is not a chain of events leading to a more advanced, progressive

state of being, but a sustained calamity, where society is always approaching the edge of

some new ruin.

James Joyce's *Dubliners* illustrates the state of calamity that Benjamin describes,

as Dublin is portrayed as a city aspiring to the models of London and Paris, but plagued

by industrial and moral decay, and a waning sense of national identity and history. Garry

Leonard has argued that Modernist writing renders the city as both a location and an experience, one which encapsulates the irony of isolation in ever more crowded spaces:

> The experience of modernity is fostered by the rise of the modern city, and works of modernism do not so much convey this experience as they betray the strain of surviving it and detail various strategies for doing so. Thus modernism might be regarded less as a representation of modernity and more as a symptom of it. "What are the dangers of the forest and the prairie compared with the daily shocks and conflicts of civilization?," Charles Baudelaire asks (qtd. In Benjamin 39). Indeed, the city is a forest, one rendered all the more dangerous because it appears to be the final triumph over nature. (80)

The Dublin of *Dubliners* is an illustration of those "daily shocks and conflicts of civilization." As Terence Brown writes, "Symptoms of stagnation and concomitant misery were not hard to find" (xviii) as Dublin's port – its main economic engine – flagged under competition from Cork and Belfast to serve as the primary Irish trading post with mainland Europe." Most of the city's working class, some 200,000 people, were left to live in dilapidated tenements, and even the historic districts of Dublin, Brown notes, were criticized for failing to live up to the standard of modern continental European beauty and architecture.

The characters in *Dubliners* reflect the city's anxieties about its flagging economy and perceived cosmopolitan deficiencies. While leaving the Morkan sisters' party in *The Dead,* Gabriel is stricken to hear Bartell D'Arcey singing *The Lass of Aughrim,* an Irish folk ballad: "Now that the hall-door was closed the voice and the piano could be heard more clearly. Gabriel held up his hand for them to be silent. The song seemed to be in the old Irish tonality and the singer seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice" (211). Julie Henigan believes that the use of a specific "tonality" makes the ballad distinctly Irish: "In this phrase ["old Irish tonality"], [Joyce] almost certainly meant to

suggest what is commonly called the "modality" of many traditional Irish melodies, "modality" here referring to the European diatonic modes, especially those not corresponding to the modern major and minor keys" (141). Henigan then convincingly contends that the Irish method of singing is a symbol for traditional Irish culture and identity put in opposition to a modernizing European continent – an overarching theme in the story and in the entire collection. The Bartell D'Arcy scene should be understood in tandem with an earlier dinner scene, in which the guests discuss opera. They can all easily recall the acclaim that follows the performance of the Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, but Aunt Kate has difficulty identifying a local singer who "had then the purest tenor voice that was ever put into a man's throat" (200). Bartell D'Arcy's impromptu performance is marked not only by his Irish tonality, but also the morose quality of his singing: "The voice, made plaintive by distance and by the singer's hoarseness, faintly illuminated the cadence of the air with words expressing grief" (211). Bartell D'arcy is never able to finish his performance of the song that so moves everyone; in fact, he is only willing to perform it when he thinks the others are too distracted to listen. He sings just a few brief lines, and briskly claims to be too hoarse when pestered to continue. When Gretta asks about the name of the song, the response is short: "It's called *The Lass of Aughrim*, said Mr. D'Arcy, but I couldn't remember it properly" (213). If the song and its performance deal in loss, then Mr. D'Arcy's expression of this emotion is truncated, with his hoarse voice and inability to remember the words serving as a failure of both communication and memory. So too for the characters at the table: Aunt Kate's inability to recall the name of the greatest Irish singer she has ever heard, even as she so vividly

remembers Enrico Caruso, suggests a fear that Irish culture had become muted and incommunicable as Dublin sought, perhaps unsuccessfully, to greet a modernizing world at the turn of the 20th century. As he lies down next to his sleeping wife at the end of the story, Gabriel thinks that "[o]ne by one they were all becoming shades" (224). The "they" indicates not just the members of the party, but the whole of Irish culture they are meant to represent. The stunted, muted nature of music in the *The Dead* signifies an omnipresent dystopian energy, evoking both the personal failures of individual characters, and the slow evaporation of Irish identity and culture. Because of lapses in memory and voice, the text's last scene of Dublin is that of a graveyard, one populated by the living and the dead, who have merged into a indistinguishable grey in the face of Modernity.

Leonard tells us that Joyce reimagines the role of the flâneur in the guise of the artists; rather than a strolling observer of city life, says Leonard, Joyce positions the artist as a kind of categorizing force, one who attempt to bring discipline to the chaos and danger of the modern city under a rubric of aesthetic theory. That is, categorizing *this* as beautiful, or *that* as grotesque is a bid to bring some kind of order to the "nearly unmanageable assault of noise, illogical juxtaposition, relentless unpredictability and enigmatic epiphanies, all made publically available to anyone of all classes" (84) of the city. But, I suggest, Joyce's city observers, from *Dubliners* to Stephen Dedalus to Bloom, are never able to wrangle the city's endless spiral of significations and fragmentations. Just as Bloom observes his marriage spin out from under him, the Joycean observer always watches the city spin away from a centralizing force. In its place are a series of

encounters which offer the promise of revelation or romance, but almost invariably lead to some misfortune, small or large. In "An Encounter," a young narrator and his friend, Mahony, conspire to ditch school for a day so that they may travel around Dublin, marveling at its magnitude. Instead, they are greeted by a young boy who launches epithets at them when he takes them for Protestants, a decaying ferry system by the river, and then, most disturbingly, an older, menacing man who wanders to them as they rest on a hill near the water. After interrogating the boys about how many girlfriends they have, and expressing his own wish to be a young boy once again, he abruptly stands to leave:

> He stood up slowly, saying that he had to leave us for a minute or so, a few minutes, and, without changing the direction of my gaze, I saw him walk slowly away from us towards the near end of the field. We remained silent when he had gone. After a few minutes I heard Mahony exclaim, "I say! Look what he's doing!" (18).

The man most likely masturbates in front of the boys (or, at the least, exposes himself to them from a distance), before returning. That the boys decide to use fake names with the man indicates their sense that he is dangerous, and that the entire exchange is a perverse one. The story ends as the narrator works up the courage to drag Mahony away from the man. The meeting with a probable pedophile ends their day as young observers of Dublin, but stands in for what Joyce's larger experience of Modernizing Dublin: a historic but decaying city, struggling to compete with cosmopolitan Europe, rife with strangers who all too quickly reveal themselves as predators.

Utopian and Dystopian States

Modern dystopian theory has its roots in the much of the major cultural criticism of the Twentieth Century, as dystopian impulses are found in the works of Theodor

Adorno, Jean-Franocis Lyotard and Frederic Jameson. It is first important to note the

intrinsic connection between dystopian and utopian fictions; utopian and dystopian

theories and stories are not just elements along a spectrum, they are direct antipathies,

linked by their constant analysis and appraisal of the other. In terms of current theory,

one does not exist without the other. Keith M. Booker defines utopian thinking, and the

literature that it produces, as a critical belief in humanity's imaginative power to enact the

future: art and philosophy imagine an ideal state of human society and social behavior, to

be achieved through the implementation of some new or improved system of belief (*The*

Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature). In *Postmodernism*, Fredric Jameson describes

utopian thinking in reference to Hegel's concept of "reconciliation" between states of

being: "[...] which is to say, the illusion of the possibility of some ultimate reunion

between a subject and an object radically sundered or estranged from each other, or even

[...] to some new "synthesis" between them" (334-335).

Jameson implies that belief is a fundamental element of utopian thinking; that a

synthesis between subject and object - and in the case of utopian philosophy, the subject

is understood as society, and the object as its ideal or most perfect state of being or

function – can be enacted through a belief structure. Many religions, at their core, rely on

utopian ideology, promising providence or enlightenment as a reward for behavior that

adheres to the belief system. Jameson's concerns, however, are closely tied to art, politics

and secular philosophies, arguing that the primary engine of all political energy is a faith

in the systematized improvement of society through the implementation of a social

construct. As a Marxist, Jameson is ultimately suspicious of ideologies, but he notes in

The Political Unconscious that "all class consciousness – or in other words, all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes – is in its very nature Utopian" (289). Jameson admits here the utopian nature of political movements. Moreover, he extends that analysis to art and philosophy, arguing that the very practices operate on a notion that intellectual and artistic endeavors can serve to better the communities in which they are introduced. Regardless of the specific field (art, philosophy, politics), the defining characteristic of Jameson's understanding of utopianism is *belief*. The content of the belief systems vary given the situation, but the presence of a belief structure is key: A utopian world is one achieved through the implementation of an ideal belief.

As Booker notes, utopian belief structures have existed since ancient times, stretching from Plato's *Republic* to the Western world's faith in reason and rationality during the time of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. Even in the mid Nineteenth Century, Booker suggests a prevailing belief in the liberating power of science and Enlightenment thinking; advances in scientific ability seemed to mean that nothing was out of the power of man to imagine and then create. But by the late Nineteenth Century, scientific advancements were also revealing the limitations of man's ability to create:

> Meanwhile, nineteenth-century scientific discoveries like the Second Law of Thermodynamics and Darwin's theory of evolution were suggesting strict limits on the Enlightenment notion of unlimited progress and of the boundless power of the human mind to overcome all obstacles set before it. By the end of the century science and technology had become symbols not only of human capability, but of human weakness and limitation. (6)

By the Twentieth Century, cultural theorists from the Frankfurt School were establishing critiques of the unwavering belief in the progress of rationality, arguing for the notion of enlightenment as a deceptive system. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer note:

> On the road to modern science, men renounce any claim to meaning. They substitute formula for concept, rule and probability for cause and motive [...] for the enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect. So long as it can develop undisturbed by any outward repression, there is no holding it. In the process it treats its own idea of human rights exactly as it does the older universals [...] which means that enlightenment still recognizes itself even in myths. (5-6)

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that rather than being a system which frees the human mind from myth, magic, spirituality and the "older universals," unblemished faith in science and industrial progress have merely replaced those universals even as they functions in the same manner.[7] Writing as exiles from the Third Reich, Adorno and Horkheimer's work views Nazi fascism as an abomination, but not necessarily an aberration; ancient beliefs in the unknown have been replaced by the Enlightenment's complete fear of it, and thus any system that is mechanized and total becomes a sanctuary, even one that forces its participants to willingly engage in genocide. The point here is not that Nazi Germany was dystopic, but that its existence compels critics like Adorno and Horkheimer to some of the earliest Modernist dystopian thinking: the fear that, if older universal systems and modern scientific systems have come to behave as one another, then *all* systems of belief are flawed, and progress is an illusion.

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[7]I think it is important to note that many readers incorrectly assume that Adorno and Horkheimer argue that Enlightenment is necessarily a myth, or, by nature mythical. I do not read the text this way. Instead, I think they are performing a reading of a historical variance; that is, that as it has developed over the century and-a-half they observe, faith in Enlightenment values has come to function much the same as faith in mythology, religion or the supernatural.

The disillusion with even the possibility of utopian progress becomes a major feature of literature and cultural criticism in the mid-to-late Twentieth Century. Jean-Francois Lyotard suggests that science and "metanarratives" have always been in conflict with one another (*The Postmodern Condition*).[8] Moreover, he argues that the Enlightenment is a grand narrative, wherein knowledge works toward the ethical and social goal of peace. He questions the validity of that narrative, however, terming his suspicions "postmodern" and describing the postmodern condition as "an incredulity toward metanarratives [...] the narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages [...] it is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive and so on" (509). Perhaps the most fitting description comes from the seminal work *Shape of Utopia*, where Robert C. Elliot comments:

> To believe in utopia one must believe that through the exercise of their reason men can control and in major ways alter for the better their social environment [...] To believe in utopia one must have faith of a kind that our history has made nearly inaccessible. This is one major form of the crisis of faith under which Western culture reels. (86)

The criticism detailed here goes by many names, from high modernism, to deconstructionism, to postmodernism, but I contend that a guiding feature of these theories is an examination of the loss of belief; or rather, the thinking that all systems of belief promising utopia progress are suspicious. This skepticism forms the basis of my

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[8]Lyotard uses the term "metanarratives," which in the context of his argument, seems similar in definition to Adorno and Horkheimer's "older universals"; both terms denote systems of belief or understanding that are not *necessarily* scientific or rational by their nature. Lyotard describes "the hermeneutics of meaning" (509), while Adorno and Horkheimer write of magic and mythology, but they seem to describe systems which, to borrow from Adorno and Horkheimer, "[do] not conform to the rule of computation and utility."

definition of the relationship between utopian and dystopian thinking: in short, utopia

describes a presence, and dystopia describes an absence. Utopian hope is founded on the

presence of widespread belief in a system of behavior or ethics as a path to its own ideal

state, and a utopian community is one that successfully enacts those prescriptions.

Dystopian fear, on the other hand, examines the partial or complete loss of such faiths,

and a dystopian community is one suffering under both the consequences of failed

utopian policies, and an evaporating sense of belief in any ability to progress or improve.

Practically speaking, dystopian narratives are valuable for their ability to

illuminate and analyze the flaws inherent to a given strand of utopian thinking. Booker

helpfully comments that:

> [D]ystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct
> opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative
> consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature
> generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political
> systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premises upon
> which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative
> extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly
> reveal their flaws and contradictions. (3)

The "imaginative extension" comes through a process which I will refer to as

defamiliarization. Dystopian stories frequently feature societies or communities familiar

to our own in their social, political, or economic composition, but differentiated by time,

location or, often, technological capability; the effect distances the reader or viewer

enough to critically analyze what might otherwise be dismissed as commonplace or

familiar. Some stories, like Joyce's *Dubliners*, subtly exaggerate the moral deterioration

of a city. Others—William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, for

example—more explicitly illustrate the large scale collapse or disintegration of political

and economic systems, as well as common forms of social interaction. In chapter two, for example, I argue that three contemporary tales—Alfonso Cauron's film *Children of Men*, Danny Boyle's film *28 Days Later* and Cormac McCarthy's apocalyptic novel *The Road*—perform the project of dystopian critical analysis, while responding to the social and political critiques from globalization theorists and critics.

The following chapters are unique in historicizing the rise of dystopian and apocalyptic literature in relationship to the rise of Modernity. The theoretical frameworks outlined above often describe momentary disillusionments with industrial or technological progress, a context which has long informed the popular definition of "dystopian." This project recognizes this framework, but pushes the field toward an understanding of the role that globalization has played in cultivating the *current field* of dystopian literature and film, and shows how the growth of the transnational community, and the intersections and antagonisms it brings, impacts a significant contemporary genre.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter Two: After the Towers: Terrorism, Global Media and the Dystopian Zeitgeist

If the rise of Modernism was distinctly tied to the rise of the modern city, the dominant narrative at the other end of the Twentieth Century is rooted in paranoia and fear about its susceptibility to attack and collapse. The September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks and the images they produced—smoldering skyscrapers, collapsing towers, rubble and debris mixed with body parts and photographs—were burned into the collective

consciousness of a digital public and inform this pervasive cultural fear. So too do train

bombings in London and Madrid,[9] hotel explosions and shootings in Mumbai,[10] and

sustained popular fear of biological warfare. These events, among many others, coalesce

to create widespread feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, which take root in images of

urban destruction.

Chapter One looks specifically to issues of memory, trauma and representation in

what, for many in the United States, is the most dystopian occurrence of the new century:

the September 11th terrorist attacks. Specifically, I explore the attacks on the North and

South Towers of the World Trade Center, and the popular imagery of burning

skyscrapers, crumbling industrialization and human rubble they engender. I first argue

that contemporary terrorism and terrorists need to be understood as emerging from the

processes of globalization as amorphous, subaltern groups which design their attacks to

maximize exposure in the symbolic exchange of the global media. From there, I propose

that the symbols which emerge from the dust and death in Manhattan on September 11th

fit Edward Burke's classic definition of the *Sublime*: a massive, horrifying and

hypnotizing spectacle of destruction, pain and mass casualty.

I insist that terrorism is both a physical and cultural phenomenon, and that

cultures of terror exist and effect contemporary global culture. Terry Eagleton's *Holy*

Terror, which claims that terrorism forces death and destruction into the consciousness of

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[9]On Thursday, April 11, 2004, 191 people were killed in coordinated train bombings in Madrid, and on Thursday, July 7, 2005, 56 people were killed in coordinated bombings in London's underground train system and aboard one bus.

[10]Between November 26-29, 2008, 164 people were killed in coordinated bombings and shootings at a series of hotels and cafes in Mumbai, India.

a culture, shows that dystopian stories which mimic those events allow cultures to process the sublime danger and fear that result from a safer proximity. Finally, I end with a discussion of the Falling Man, a specific image of a man falling from the North Tower on September 11th, and perhaps the most significant cultural image produced by the attacks as a whole. The Falling Man is central element in both Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, which use the image and the taboos that surround the image to suggest that art and literature can create agency for wounded and stunned observers of real-world dystopian imagery.

Chapter Three: Dystopian Global Conflict and Mass Destruction

In the decade after September 11th, often referred to as the War on Terror decade, contemporary dystopian fiction is set against the backdrop of the attacks and suffused with the vocabulary and imagery of urban terrorism. Chapter Two moves to fiction in the War on Terror decade. The destruction wrought on family units in these texts speaks to a dialogue with the global. As critics of globalization raise important concerns about population growth, migration, and scarce resources, the disassembling and rebuilding of families in dystopian stories stands in for the interaction that individuals and small groups have with the global community. This dystopian engagement with globalization underpins Alfonso Cauron's 2006 film *Children of Men,* Danny Boyle's 2002 zombie redux film *28 Days Later*, and Cormac McCarthy's 2006 apocalyptic novel *The Road.* In *Children of Men* war, immigration and infertility are the backdrop for a story of a society with no systematized structure belief and, literally, no hope for its own future. *28 Days Later* utilizes the zombie horror genre as a metaphor for mass infection and biological

warfare in the post-September 11th world community. *The Road*, meanwhile, depicts

characters who struggle with the complete loss of organizing systems—governments,

religious institutions and nuclear families—in the face of an unknown worldwide

disaster. In focusing their stories on small groups of survivors who form improvised

domestic units, Cauron, Boyle and McCarthy position the family (and the authors /

directors define family in many ways, as we will see) as a counterbalance to a myriad of

dystopian global crises.

Chapter Four: The Global Posthuman: Dystopian Evolution and Corporate

Hegemony

The final chapter of this project turns to extremely recent dystopian fiction. As

public attention shifted drastically away from the War on Terror after the global financial

recession of 2008-2009, dystopian stories moved away from the drastic imagery of

catastrophic urban destruction, and instead moved toward a discussion of the anxieties

which animate post-recession culture: class conflict, the gulf between corporations and

individuals, and the further depletion of world resources. Even more interestingly, recent

dystopian fiction often takes up questions of the basic nature of humanity and its

relationship to technology by imagining future worlds in which there is no clear

demarcation between what is natural and what is constructed, between the human and the

cyborg. In this chapter, I examine Paolo Bacigalupi's 2009 posthuman novel *The Windup*

Girl and Ken Levine's *Bioshock* game series (2008-2014). These texts foreground

concerns about wealth inequality and power, and the role of corporations in biological

and environmental development. In this chapter, I look to fiction infused with the

apprehension and fear of the early and mid-2000s, but which looks forward to concerns

about humanity's ability to sustain and inhabit the planet in the shadow of global

corporate power.

CHAPTER TWO

AFTER THE TOWERS: TERRORISM, GLOBAL MEDIA AND

THE DYSTOPIAN ZEITGEIST

Before turning to popular dystopian texts, it is vital to understand the role that

terrorism and the War on Terror played in creating a pervasive global psychology of

paranoia, xenophobia and fear in the new millennium.[1] The September 11th attacks, and

the massive cultural zeitgeist they engendered—one replete with images of urban

destruction, suffused with the vernacular of subaltern threats, and anchored by more than

a decade of war—are directly responsible for the enormous outpouring of dystopian

stories in the new millennium. On Monday, September 17th 2001, less than one full week

after four hijacked planes were flown into the World Trade Center Towers, the Pentagon

and a field in Pennsylvania, novelist Martin Amis wrote:

> It is already trite - but stringently necessary - to emphasise that such a mise en
> scène would have embarrassed a studio executive's storyboard or a thriller-writer's

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[1]There have been many instances in which a leader or national representative has vowed to wage battle against terrorism (or specific terrorists). The term "War on Terror" was popularized by George W. Bush in the weeks after the September 11th attacks, but defining its scope and reach is a section of political theory unto itself. For my purposes here, the "War on Terror" refers to the international military operation led by a loose coalition of NATO and Non-NATO states against fundamentalist terrorism after the September 11th attacks.

Barack Obama has at several points implied or outright declared the War on Terror and its doctrine of preemptive aggression to be over—at least as an official tactical pursuit of the US government. In a 2010 speech at the National Defense University, Obama said, "Beyond Afghanistan, we must define our effort not as a boundless 'global war on terror' – but rather as a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America" (quoted in *The Washington Post*, May 23rd, 2013). That said, the basic elements of the campaign—a draconian domestic and international spying apparatus, a program of extraordinary rendition, the ever-expanding use of drone warfare against militant extremists—are still fully operational and functional, and most political writers argued that the War on Terror has never actually end, even if the term has been retired.

notebook ("What happened today was not credible," were the wooden words of Tom Clancy, the author of *The Sum of All Fears*). And yet in broad daylight and full consciousness that outline became established reality: a score or so of Stanley knives produced two million tons of rubble. (*The Guardian*)

That Amis finds the comparison of the attacks to a movie storyboard trite just six days after the attacks speaks both to how frequently that particular comparison was invoked in the immediate spectre of September 11th, and to the pervasive and lasting difficulty of contextualizing the scale and horror of the destruction.

Across the country, front pages of national and regional newspapers responded to the attacks with startling similarity: an image of the burning North and South World Trade Towers, and a short, bolded exclamation of fear ("Terrifying";[2] "Terror!"[3]), anguish ("Day Of Death";[4] "America Savaged, Changed Forever"[5]) or anger ("Bastards!;"[6] "OUTRAGE"[7]). The confusion and anger—the uncertainty that underlines the *Akron Beacon Journal's* "Who Did This?" headline —of the days immediately following the attacks portented the months and years to follow, as the struggle to comprehend their occurrence morphed into a deep cultral struggle to comprehend their meaning. And trite though Amis may have found them, the analogies to big budget disasters films hinted at a cultural phenomenom that would soon emerge, in which the attacks were aestheticized in literary and cinematic representation to assert control over

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[2]*The Oakland Tribune.*

[3]*The Arizona Republic.*

[4]*The Indianapolis Star.*

[5]*The Detroit Press.*

[6]*The San Francisco Examiner.*

[7]*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*

their impact and affect. I argue here that the aura of terrorism draped itself, in subtle and unsubtle ways, over popular fiction and imagination because the structural intent of terrorism works toward that result. Mass-scale acts of terrorism utilize devices typical to fiction, metaphor and symbolism, to embed themselves in cultural memory.

In the decade since, many authors aestheticize the attacks, hoping that the metaphors and symbols bound up in terrorism can be repurposed to different cultural or personal affect. In this chapter, I argue that contemporary terrorist events—the September 11th attacks are my primary focus, but the public transit bombings in London and Madrid and the shootings in Mumbai also come immediately to mind—are intimately connected to the experience of globalization, both for those that experience the attacks and for those that perpatrate them. They are true global spectacles, imbued with meaning that is intended to reveerbarate through transnational channels of media and migration. Scenes attendant to terrorism—smoldering skyscrapers, collapsing towers, rubble and debris mixed with body parts and photographs—burn themselves into the collective consciousness of a digital global public and coalesce to create the dystopian psychology which blooms in the new millennium.

Theory and Context: Fact and Representation on 9/11

As with all cultural forces, definitions impact meaning, and the relationship between terrorism and globalization is impacted by how we define and historicize these forces. In my introduction, I outlined the debate between critics who view globalization as a contemporary phenomenon predicated on a distinct break from previous modes of communication and travel (what Appadurai refers to as a "rupture" (2) in *Modernity at*

Large), and critics who view contemporary globalization as an *acceleration* of long-existing forces. I agree with Roland Robertson, who famously defined globalization as "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole," (8) and Paul Jay, who writes that "globalization actually has a long history and [the] whole arch of European imperial expansion, colonization, decolonization, and the establishment of postcolonial states figures prominently in that history" (41). What we today call globalization has a long historical and cultural genesis. In this chapter, I bridge these critics, using Appadurai's concept of "scapes" (fluid global portals through which culture, money and images move) and Robertson's theory of "glocalization," arguing that terrorist events are localized dystopian tragedies whose symbology echo through global portals.

In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai identifies a number of dimensions through which global goods, culture and money are exchanged; portals which he refers to as "scapes." These include *technoscapes*, which encompasses global technology of travel and communication; *financescapes*, which account for the expansive and often subaltern flow of global capital; and *ethnoscapes*, which are the most difficult to describe, but seem to generally conceptualize a landscape of individuals who populate the movement of globalization, including travelers, businesspeople, guest workers, immigrants, refugees, exiles and other moving groups. Appadurai's concept of *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes* are most useful. He writes that "*mediascape*s refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios)[8] which are now available to a growing number of

[8]An updated account of *mediascapes* would no doubt include any number of web-media.

public and private interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created

by the media" (35). Put differently: the entirety of the image-producing media, and the

narrative—of an event, a culture, globalization itself—that the images create and

reinforce for an eager public in a constant cycle of production and reification. Closely

related, *ideoscapes* refer to images and narratives that contain an explicit political or

nationalist ideology, and which similarly travel through media channels. Taken together,

these scapes are "scripts" that:

> [C]an and do get disaggregated into complex metaphors by which people live
> (LaKoff and Johnson 1980) as they help to constitute narratives of the Other and
> protonarratives of possible lives, fantasies that could become prolegomena to the
> desire for acquisition and movement. (35-36)

Mediascapes and *ideoscapes* in many ways form the basis for Appadurai's concept of

Globalization as a whole. Rooted heavily in Benedict Anderson's work on "imagined

communities,"[9] Appadurai argues that the individuals who populate the global

community, who participate in the movement and exchanges of the *scapes*, have an

agency to construct highly unique identities based on the cultural elements they access in

these portals. He doesn't fetishize his concept, but it is a largely positive view of a global

cosmopolitanism in which individuals have significant ability to assemble diverse

identities in ways that were inaccessible to past generations. Kwame Anthony Appiah

expands on Appadurai in *The Case for Contamination*, arguing for a transnational

community of travelers and terming global culture "Cosmopolitanism." Appiah suggests

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[9]Anderson defined an "imagined community" as one not predicated on a daily physical or social
interaction – like, say, a small town of people – but rather on constructed beliefs or ideologies to which
individuals belong, whether willingly, unwillingly or unknowingly. Anderson's work relates most direct to
discussion of nationalism, and the manner in which individuals from diverse backgrounds imagine
themselves to belong to the same national identity.

that the cosmopolitan is "citizen of the world," who seems to carry an inherited, regional culturalism to new locations, creating meaning through pluralistic, polyglot difference.

Roland Robertson's concept of "glocalization" is a productive corollary to Appadurai and Appiah. Like Appadurai, Robertson recognizes the "complex metaphors" used by global citizens to construct their conceptions of others and themselves, but argues that thinking of globalization in purely or predominantly macro social terms—for example, as transcultural portals in which cosmopolitan identities are sculpted—elides the reality of the local, or lived experience of a particular place or culture. Robertson writes that:

> The reason for my emphasizing the local as adding a spatial dimension to the study of globalization, *contra Appadurai*, is mainly because sociology has—again until recently—been centered upon diachronicity, or temporality. In fact from Marx onward, the so-called classical sociologist through Max Weber were, above all, preoccupied with the shift from pre-modern to modern societies. Thus to speak of glocalization is meant to ensure that the general discussion of globalization encompasses the cross-cutting dimension of locality along spatial lines. ("The Conceptual Promise of Glocalization")

Put differently, Robertson developed the concept of glocalization, a portmanteau of *global* and *local,* as a way to foreground the simultaneity of the micro and the macro in the globalized world; events have a local impact and reality, but exist in a global context, and produce meaning in the fluid constellation of metaphors, symbols and stories at the heart of Appaduri's definition of globalization.

Though they are infrequently cited in discussions of terrorism,[10] I argue that Appadurai and Robertson's conceptualizations are essential to understanding both contemporary terrorist acts and, crucially, the cultural response that the authors discussed

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[10]I'm struggling to find any scholarly citation of either critic in a major paper about terrorism in any of the standard databases – Academic Search Premier, Ebsco, JSTOR.

later in this chapter engage in. C.A.J. Coady suggests that while "terrorism" is a loaded word carrying a variety of meanings, the term denotes two generally agreed upon features. First: in order to be considered an act of terror, an event must include violence (or a significant threat of violence) against a group of people widely considered to be innocent: "More exactly, I would define [terrorism] as the organized use of violence to attack non-combatants ('innocents' in a special sense) or their property for political purposes" ("Defining Terrorism," 5). The immediate destruction and death of terrorist event is only a portion of the act itself, which brings us to the second feature: terrorism is primarily intended to affect or alter the behavior of people not directly subjected to the violence and pain of the event. Igor Primoratz notes that:

> In terrorism proper, causing fear and coercion through fear are *the* objective […]
> for terrorism very often aims at setting off long and complex social processes,
> involving much irrational behavior, that are meant to disorient the public and
> destabilize various social arrangements and institutions, if not social life in
> general. ("What is Terrorism?" 24)

That is to say that I think the most rigorous definitions of contemporary terrorism recognize that symbology is its primary objective, not death. For as tragic, horrific and massive as the loss of life on September 11th was, the men who hijacked the planes that were flown never really intended to punish the particular individuals in the World Trade Center Towers and the Pentagon.[11] Certainly, it was central to the heinousness of the attacks, but the larger objective is the injection of fear, the disruption of life, and the alteration of public policy injected into society in the months and years beyond the attacks themselves.

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[11] Or the Capitol Building, which most investigators speculate was the intended target of the hijacked Flight 93 United plane.

Alex Houen, much like Primoratz, argues that beyond the immediate material reality of death and destruction, terrorism is, at its very core, a symbolic act (*Terrorism and Modern Literature*). It is a collision of symbols and metaphors competing for the attention of a large audience, sometimes specific and sometimes nonspecific. Terrorist acts have an intended political and social reception, and also a cultural life beyond the duration of the destruction – the public and private reception of the act is part of an ongoing negotiation of the event. And in a globalized world, that constant public and personal negotiation of the meaning and significance of the events occurs in the very portals and *scapes* that Appadurai describes. The technologies of communication that define Appadurai's *mediascapes* were also primed for an event like the September 11th attacks. Perhaps never before in history has a single event been so well-documented: in stories, cell phone videos, photographs, audio recordings and a twenty-four hour news media which first broadcast and re-broadcast the attacks. Intended as spectacle, the mediums and modalities of the *mediascape* became central to the lasting experience of the terrorism, and underscore the truly *glocal* nature of the attacks. In a 2009 interview with Mark Athitakis, Kristiaan Versluys, author of the 9/11 study *Out of the Blue*, suggests:

> 9/11 is arguably the first instance of what one could call global trauma. It was witnessed not only by the people in the direct vicinity of the WTC-towers on that bright Tuesday morning. It was also witnessed by millions and presumably hundreds of millions on TV, either live or in the many repetitions of the iconic images that everybody remembers […] all notions that are current in trauma theory – may have to be adapted or revised to fit the new category of global trauma. Televised indirect experience raises new questions as to what is genuine and what is hype and it establishes new conditions for making memorializing into an act of approximation and not an act of appropriation. (Athitakis)

Reading the attacks as *glocal*, Robertson would insist that we cannot elide the immediacy of the event; the devastation, death, urban destruction and environmental poisoning encapsulate the real, lived experience of the attacks – its diachronicity—as do the days of search and rescue, weeks and months of poisonous clean-up, and the years of rebuilding and memorializing. But the array of metaphors, stories and debates that spiral through the *mediascapes* and into public consciousnesses constitute the symbolic life of a global terrorist event. When, in the quote introducing this chapter, Martin Amis comments that the attacks would "embarrass a studio executive's storyboard," he's speaking to the public negotiation of the attack: the symbolic (in)comprehension of the mass violence. As Richard Schechner wrote:

> The world was given free tickets to a real-life made-for-media movie. The images from New York uncannily resembled The Towering Inferno, the Godzilla movies, and other catastrophe films where terrified, panicked crowds flee down the canyons of Manhattan ahead of fire, smoke, and debris. Although the pentagon was also hit, and a hijacked plane crashed in Pennsylvania […] New York took center stage (265).

For the significant majority of the nation that experienced the carnage not firsthand, but through the gaze of a news camera and the glow of a television, the comparisons between Hollywood disaster films and the lived destruction of the attacks were a natural, if trite, effort to put unfamiliar fear and death into a familiar context.

The aesthetic shock and the visceral reality of the attack leave the observing public at a difficult juxtaposition. On the one hand, the analogies to disaster films and big budget actions make sense as an organizing reference: the scale of the attacks is so unbelievable (a point I'll revisit in greater detail shortly) that the unreal or the fictional is the only context that seems proportionate. On the other hand, an event like September

11th hardly seems a natural subject for fiction; the sheer amount of destruction and death,

and the extreme degree to which the events of the attacks were documented via

television, photographs, newspapers, cellphone video and amateur photography, mark it

as an event which few people associate with fictionalization. Houen notes, "It was a day

in which terrorism exploded into a sheer viscerality of *fact*[12]" (1). But the magnitude of

that viscerality renders its experience almost numbing, and nearly impossible to

categorize. The comparison to films, the stunned, angry headlines in newspapers, and the

endless replays of the Tower falling and debris-caked people running in abject fear are a

part of the *glocal* mediation of the event.

In his essay "The Ruins of the Future," *Falling Man* author Don DeLillo gives

voice to that juxtaposition of so many observers, writing about the necessity of locating,

documenting and reproducing the myriad individual stories and experiences that were

born out of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers, the Pentagon, and in

Pennsylvania:

> The cellphones, the lost shoes, the handkerchiefs mashed in the faces of running men and women. The box cutters and the credit cards. The paper that came streaming out of the towers and drifted across the river to Brooklyn backyards […] These are among the smaller objects and more marginal stories in the shifted ruins of the day. We need them, even the common tools of the terrorists, to set against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable, too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practiced response. (34)

Indeed, the "unmanageable" nature of the attacks captures attention throughout much of

DeLillo's essay and novel, as he grapples with what critic Marco Abel describes as

competing desires to aestheticize and experiment with representations of September 11th,

or to act as a kind of journalist, struggling to accurately transcribe and represent an event

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[12]Emphasis mine.

which seems, literally, "incomprehensible," ("DeLillo's Ruins of the Future," 1239).

DeLillo's difficulty in finding the appropriate manner of representation for September

11th speaks to the larger issue of aesthetics in literature which describes actual—that is,

lived and historical—events of widespread terror, violence and destruction.

I mention Houen here because he helpfully articulates the manner in which many

works of fiction dealing with terrorism or destruction attempt to negotiate the gap

between journalism and fiction. Doubtless, categories like "literature" and "film" carry

the connotation of fiction: an artistic rendering even of events based in reality. But novels

and films depicting acts of terrorism challenge these notions on a variety of fronts.

Contemporary films have, with increasing frequency, attempted to walk a line between

fiction and a documentary-like approach to representation. *The New York Times* noted the

intense length that director Paul Greengrass took to achieve "a believable truth" in

writing and filming his 2006 film *United 93*, a docu-drama styled retelling of the United

flight 93's hijacking and eventual crash into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania:

> [Greengrass] incorporates information about the disaster, including the plane's
> exact movements in the air, the times and content of phone calls to family
> members, recordings from inside the cockpit and reaction on the ground from air
> traffic controllers and the military, as well as details about the passengers'
> personalities and mannerisms provided by the families. ("Four Years On, a
> Cabin's-Eye View of 9/11"*)*

The practical effect of all this research is a film that feels clinical and sparse, like a

documentary, even as the audience knows that vital lines of dialogue and key events

within the cabin of the plane were improvised. The aesthetic affect, many critics argued,

was that the intensely realistic style of the film removed it from the tainted, complex

cultural debate about the attacks that emerged in the five years between September 11th and the film. Roger Ebert opened his positive review of *United 93* by saying,

> It is not too soon for "United 93," because it is not a film that knows any time has passed since 9/11. The entire story, every detail, is told in the present tense. We know what they know when they know it, and nothing else. Nothing about Al Qaeda, nothing about Osama bin Laden, nothing about Afghanistan or Iraq, only events as they unfold. This is a masterful and heartbreaking film, and it does honor to the memory of the victims.

Ebert's commentary is instructive in many ways. The most pressing point here is that Ebert thinks a realistic depiction of the events of September 11th, one that remains "present tense," can remove itself from the *glocal mediascapes* and *ideascapes* to which the event now belongs. Ebert, a very smart critic, thinks that this particular depiction of a terrorist attack can be separated from the symbolic negotiation of the event that follows it, and in doing so, can serve to honor the memory of victims by distancing them from the political and social realms that September 11th has become associated with. Ebert overlooks or ignores the fact that the viewer brings these frames of reference to bear even if the film actively elides them. This speaks to what DeLillo calls "unmanageable"; not just the massive scale of destruction, but the struggle to reconcile the symbolic life of the act with the memory of its visceral reality. Ebert and other critics praised Greengrass's film for attempting to distance the two, and while I disagree that that is even possible, the mere fact that Ebert opens his review of the film in this way speaks to the prevalence of the debate over fictional representations of actual tragedies. Even as we know that the symbology of an event carries equal weight to the lived destruction, the public struggles with obvious questions: "When has enough time passed to fictionalize this event?" "When is it 'too soon'"? "What kind of fictionalization is appropriate?"

The persistence of these questions regarding the nature and appropriateness of September 11th fiction coexists with an ever-expanding pool of such literature and film. That same 2006 *New York Times* article describing Greengrass's extensive research into United flight 93 opens by noting that:

> After almost universally shying away from the topic for the past four years, Hollywood is turning in full force to the events of Sept. 11, 2001. Painful memories, all-too-familiar news clips and personal stories are now being transformed into big-screen dramas, as studios look for commercial value in the still-fresh trauma, while prompting the mass audience to revisit its thoughts and feelings.

And in the decade-and-a-half since the attacks, hundreds of novels, films, and television episodes have directly or indirectly described the events of September 11th, underscoring a larger question: if its appropriateness or value is still widely debated, why is fiction about September 11th so popular? Why are we preoccupied with the unmanageable and the unspeakable?

The Aesthetics of Terrorism

The answer to that question touches on many of the forces I have described in this chapter thus far: the symbology of mass terrorism, the transmission of dystopian imagery through global media portals, and the etymological origins of terror in aesthetics. It is generally accepted that Edmund Burke is the first English writer to use the word terrorism in regard to an event of mass violence. In his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1795-96), Burke records his reflections on the most violent phase of the Jacobian Reign of Terror and the subsequent Thermidorian Reaction, and describes his horror from afar at the mass public executions committed both by the French Revolutionaries and those

that revolted against revolutionary rule.[13] Writing of the brutal purge of Jacobeans, Burke commented:

> At length, after a terrible struggle, the Troops prevailed over the Citizens. The Citizen Soldiers, the ever famed National Guards, who had deposed and murdered their Sovereign, were disarmed by the inferior trumpeters of that Rebellion […] Thousands of those Hell-hounds called Terrorists, whom they had shut up in Prison on their last Revolution, as the Satellites of Tyranny, are let loose on the people. The whole of their Government, in its origination, in its continuance, in all its actions, and in all its resources, is force; and nothing but force. (3.4.72)

In this instance, Burke's use of "Terrorists" is, in practical effect, the opposite of our contemporary understanding of the word. Burke attaches it to Government agents exerting mass violence and intimidation against the French Revolutionaries, and thereby establishing a government based on coercion, not consent.[14] Meanwhile, the contemporary conception of a terrorist is typically that of a subaltern agent or group who frequently employ violence to protest a government, not enforce its will. The amorphous, non-state character of terrorism is perhaps its most defining Twenty First Century characteristic; a shift – as I've noted in my introduction to this project– away from Cold War conflict (and the dystopian stories which emerge from it) defined by established Super Powers with economic and military might. Though his embodiment of a terrorist was substantially different from our own, Burke's use of the term and larger witness of the French Revolution is extraordinarily significant in the development of his aesthetic theory on terror, fear and the Sublime.

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[13]On the Thermidorian Reaction: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/591497/ Thermidorian-Reaction, and Burke's reaction to the Reign of Terror.

[14]Heather Welland notes of this section that "Terrorism here is associated with government coercion, with wielding illegitimate power – illegitimate because it had no consent from the people." http://www.18thcenturycommon.org/who-is-a-terrorist-terrorism-in-the-long-18th-century/.

Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* presupposes his reaction to the French Revolution, and provides a helpful vantage point for his experiences in witnessing and responding to terror and chaos. In his *Enquiry*, Burke describes The Sublime—an aesthetic quality of greatness, often connected to size and scale, in which the magnitude of an affect overwhelms the observer, leaving him or her stunned into muteness or incomprehension[15] – as the most powerful force that can attach to the human mind. More importantly, he argues for a separation between the Sublime and beauty (however defined), and instead links the Sublime with the experience of terror:

> No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endured with greatness of dimensions or not. (Part II, Section II)

That is to say that Burke believes that the experience of being in pain, and the experience of anticipating pain or death produce similar affects. The process of envisioning terror is, in effect, the process of experience it in some degree. And the central emotion produced by this experience of Sublime terror is *astonishment*:[16] "Astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other […]" (Part II, Section I). Sublime terror leaves the observer in muted awe, consumed entirely with the scale of his or her fear. Burke lists a number of qualities that he associates with the

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[15]"British Art and the Sublime" at the Tate Museum, http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-llewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418.

[16]Again, emphasis mine.

Sublime (Infinity, Obscurity, Power, Vastness, Succession, Uniformity, Darkness,

Loudness, Magnificence, Suddenness and so on) but the point here is how clearly

Burke's theorizing of the Sublime is born out later in his life as he witnesses the

Revolution agape with horror. In his short tract, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,

Burke describes France as "furiously boiling" in "a drunken delirium from the hot spirit

drawn out of the alembic of hell," and worries that the Revolution will remove the veneer

of Christian society to reveal an "uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition" which

might take its place (Para. 152). That Burke authored this triangle of thoughts—

popularizing the term "terrorist," theorizing about Sublime terror, and observing the

butchery of the French Revolution—is no accident; they exist on a continuum: Burke

understood the aesthetic hold with which fear and terror can seize mind, and then

witnessed, with equal parts revulsion and fascination, terrorism played out on a mass

scale. The same binary between fear and allure underscores contemporary reactions to

terrorism.

　　　　While Burke certainly never envisioned damage and death on the scale of modern

terrorism, the September 11th attacks fit remarkably well to his theory of the Sublime.

The planes flying through a clear sky, the burning towers set against the Manhattan

skyline and the massive spectacle of their collapse feature elements of infinity, obscurity,

power, vastness, uniformity, succession, darkness, loudness, magnificence and

succession, while producing a massive wave of astonishment. In *Holy Terror*, Terry

Eagleton sets out to explore what he calls the "metaphysical context" (vii) of terrorism—

the philosophical, emotional and aesthetic impact of terror events—and utilizes Greek

and Burkian models of the sublime. He argues that:

> As we enter the epoch of modernity, the sublime is one name for the annihilating, regenerating power we have been investigating […] the sublime is a glimpse of infinity which dissolves our identity and shakes us to our roots […] it warps the very inner structure of the mind, tugging us loose from the slackening grasp of reason. (44)

The metaphysical effect of witnessing terrorism is unmooring, because mass scale

destruction so overwhelms the mind as to separate us from rationally processing what is

being seen. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke argues that a major element of the

Sublime is *recapitulation*, whereby a pleasure or desire is amplified in two ways: because

the experience or its value is socially sanctioned, or because experiencing the Sublime

allows a witness to approximate the experiences of another: "The nature of this passion is

to put is in the place of another in whatever circumstance he is in, and to affect us in a

like manner, so that this passion may, as the occasion requires, turn either on pain or

pleasure" (Part II, Section XVIII). In its contemporary iteration, *recapitulation* operates

through the inescapability of the glocal media. The sheer omnipresence of images, videos

and stories swirling across televisions, the internet and newspapers worldwide reifies

these static symbols, concretizing their weight and power through repetition. Our sublime

fascination with terror is underscored by how often we relive the experience via the

media. These portals are impossible to escape, and thus the symbolic negotiation of the

September 11th events is impossible to evade. The globalized media forces the static

symbols into an expansive reality of images, vocabularies and coded terms that are

attenuated in our lives.

Eagleton suggests we seek out representations of the attacks to make sense of these omnipresent symbols. If there is sublime beauty in that which terrifies us, then the prospect of death is its apex, and witnessing mass death and destruction amplifies our most personal fears across a public canvas. He writes,

> If the sublime confers on us a pleasurable sense of imperishability, it also allows us to perform our deaths vicariously, thus mastering our dread of them in that dummy run known as art. By making our destiny our decision, converting our fate into our choice, we are able to pluck life from death and freedom from necessity. (46)

Literature, in this context, serves as a moral and emotional practice realm; a space to approximate that which, in this case, terrifies us, and to rehearse our reactions. Central to my argument, I would add that art is a space not only to experience mimetic death, but to *create and assert agency* in situations which produce feelings of powerlessness, anxiety and hopeless. Put simply, art and literature offer power, or at the least a measure of control, amidst dystopian trauma and sublime terror.

We find Sublime beauty in mass death and mass violence, moreso than in singular, isolated moments of pain and mortality, because the scale of mass death is both shockingly real, and yet disturbingly impersonal. The sprawling, chaotic nature of these events allow for channels of ingress, where we can imagine ourselves as one among the crowd, or a face in a wave of panic and fear. Nothing underscores this reality better than The Falling Man—a complicated touchstone in the symbology of September 11th. Even the "Falling Man" signifier is muddled. For most critics, "The Falling Man" refers to a specific photograph taken at 9:41:15 am, September 11th, by Associated Press photographer Richard Drew. The photo shows a man falling from the North Tower of the

World Trade Center 29 minutes after the tower was first struck by American Airlines

Flight 11, almost certainly forced out by smoke and heat from the crash.

Figure 2. Richard Drew's *Associated Press* photo

The identity of the man in the picture is disputed. As Tom Junod notes in an

excellent *Esquire* essay about the photo, as many as five different families have

expressed a belief that the man in the photo may be a lost member of their family. The

most widely proposed theory—the one seemingly endorsed by Junod's piece—is that the

Falling Man is Jonathan Briley, an employee at the 100th-floor restaurant Windows on the

World. Beyond Briley, "The Falling Man" is a catch-all term for the estimated 200-plus

individuals who fell or jumped to their deaths from the Towers, a great deal of them

trapped in the upper floors of the North Tower after Flight 11 severed the building in two

in a wave of smoke and jet fuel.

Though this possible identification took many years, Drew's photograph was

published by a number of national and regional newspapers on September 12, 2001,

including the *New York Times*. The reaction to the photo's publication was swift, and

overwhelmingly negative, with thousands of complaints in nearly every instance of

publication. Splaying the last, terrifying moments of a man's life across a newspaper,

magazine or webpage, critics argued, robbed him of any dignity or privacy he might have

had as he approached his demise, even amid this most public of spectacles. The photo,

not unlike images of the World Trade Towers, was quietly scrubbed from public

consciousness. Newspapers refused to publish it, 24-hour news stations that had pulled

cameras back to prevent showing falling bodies on September 11th declined to publicize

the photo. As Junod writes:

> The resistance to the image -- to the images -- started early, started immediately, started on the ground. A mother whispering to her distraught child a consoling lie: "Maybe they're just birds, honey." Bill Feehan, second in command at the fire department, chasing a bystander who was panning the jumpers with his video camera, demanding that he turn it off, bellowing, "Don't you have any human decency?" before dying himself when the building came down. In the most photographed and videotaped day in the history of the world, the images of people jumping were the only images that became, by consensus, taboo -- the only images from which Americans were proud to avert their eyes. All over the world, people saw the human stream debouch from the top of the North Tower, but here in the United States, we saw these images only until the networks decided not to allow such a harrowing view […]. ("The Falling Man")

So while the image bounded across televisions and newspapers in *glocal* portals

throughout the world, it became the signifying taboo of the day in the United States,

censured from view and willed into a cultural blind spot.

In so many ways, the Falling Man is both the most over-determined and under-

defined image of the Twenty-First Century. It is perfectly centered in a venn diagram of

the known and the unknown. It is imminently recognizable, even as its publication was,

and still is, often met with protest or censorship. The identity of the man is tentatively

confirmed, but disputed to this day. Even the nature and context of "falling" is a

traumatic experience because it is an in between: we are fully committed to the act, but

the anticipation of the moment of impact is still there. We are approaching death, but not

yet dead, making it a perfect metaphor for mortality. That's why the photo fascinates.

The image also contrasts with that of the quickly-established narrative of the day.

September 11th, as an event, was quickly organized into a narrative of heroism—of

firefighters and first responders running headlong into collapsing buildings and ashen

citizens carrying one another away from the smoldering towers. But the Falling Man

denies both narratives; he was forced out a window before help could arrive, his escape

through the streets impossible from the moment the planes slammed into the towers and

cut the top floors off from the world below. The photo both fascinates and repulses

because it cuts through the sublime horror of the day. Martin Amis, and dozens of other

critics, can compare the attacks to a lewd Hollywood plot because the sheer weight of

death and destruction depersonalizes the loss in a way we are only accustomed to seeing

in two-hour disaster film. CNN can play and replay footage of Flight 175 slamming into

the South Tower because what happened within the cabin of the plane and the windows

of the floors it struck are only left to the horror of our imagination. But the Falling Man is

solitary and individual; a single person tumbling untouched toward their death, and a

microcosm for every unseen loss and every individual moment of panic and terror.

Don DeLillo and the Falling Man

In this way, the Falling Man is the most important image to emerge from the ruins

of the attacks, and to enter the fray of the symbolic life of the attacks after the fact. And

for writers like Don DeLillo and Jonathan Safran Foer, the need to acknowledge the

image coincides with the pressing need to do as Terry Eagleton encourages, and

aesthetically intervene in the cultural and political ideascape that emerges from the

attack. The writer's voice intercedes in the space between the reality of the event and its

symbolic negotiation. To quote at length from DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future"

essay:

> The event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalising and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions. […] The event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile. We have to take the shock and horror as it is. But living language is not diminished. The writer wants to understand what this day has done to us. Is it too soon? We seem pressed for time, all of us. Time is scarcer now. There is a sense of compression, plans made hurriedly, time forced and distorted. But language is inseparable from the world that provokes it.

Questions of language and representation are at the heart of DeLillo's novel *Falling Man*.

The novel is not his most celebrated work. Reviews at the time range from reservedly

positive[17] to lukewarm,[18] but nothing approaching the praise lavished on other entries in

his canon. And rightfully so; the novel – about a man who attempts to reconcile with his

estranged family after surviving the fall of the towers – is sometimes moving, but more

often tepid in recounting the horror of the attacks. But as a document exploring the

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[17]http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/27/books/review/Rich-t.html?pagewanted=all.

[18]http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/may/26/fiction.donDeLillo.

artist's reaction to the attacks in general (and using the Falling Man image as a backdrop

in particular) the novel is a significant measure of our cultural and aesthetic catharsis. In

it, Keith Neudecker, a lawyer in the North Tower, walks out of the World Trade Center

with minor injuries before the towers collapse, and almost immediately begins attempting

to reconnect with his ex-wife, Lianne, and his son, Justin. I find Liane to be the most

interesting and compelling character in the novel, because unlike Keith's direct

experience of the attacks (told in breathless, moving detail in the stellar final chapter),

Lianne experiences the attacks like much of the country and the world did: from a near

distance, mediated by a screen or a radio. Lianne is the staggered, awe-struck observer of

the Sublime that Burke and Eagleton describe. For months and years after the attack,

Lianne experiences a process of attenuated grief. She travels around New York like a

wounded flâneur, looking to appropriate a model of healing from the crowds and

communities of the city.

  The process never works for her; the healing doesn't come from the crowds and

masses of people in Manhattan so much as the mood of these crowds increasingly

subsumes her individual experiences:

> The crowd was dense and streaming, sundown, taking them along past booths and
> food stalls, and the friends were separated within half a minute. What she began
> to feel, aside from helplessness, was a heightened sense of who she was in
> relation to the others, thousands of them, orderly but all-enclosing. Those nearby
> saw her, smiled, some of them, and spoke to her, one or two, and she was forced
> to see herself in the reflecting surface of the crowd. She became whatever they
> sent back to her. She became her face and her features, her skin color, a white
> person, white her fundamental meaning, her state of being. (184)

DeLillo's constant use of crowds as a reference point for Lianne's travels throughout

New York is meant to approximate and juxtapose Keith's specific experience in the

crowds fleeing the debris and ash billowing through downtown Manhattan when the

Towers collapsed. After checking on a coworker (dead from the impact of the plane),

Keith stumbles down 80-something floors and out into the streets with the mass of fleeing

people, where he becomes part of a fabric of movement and debris after the collapse:

> He took one step and then the next, smoke blowing over him. He felt rubble underfoot and there was motion everywhere, people running things flying past […] he could not find himself in the things he saw and heard. Two men ran by with a stretcher, someone facedown, smoke seeping out of his hair and clothes. He watched them move into the stunned distance. That's where everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name. (246)

Keith recedes into the chaos of the falling towers, losing a sense of himself—his feelings

don't register, his sense of spatial reality thrown off—among the larger wave of people

and ash. Mirroring this, Lianne later loses her sense of self amidst the crowds of New

York, but her experience is decidedly different.

Lianne's frequently-voiced concern that her identity is being lost among the

crowds of New York—or that her identity is reduced to the outward appraisals the crowd

makes of, and reflects back, to her—speaks directly to her position as a mass-mediated

observer of the catastrophe. Her sense of loss among the crowd is underscored by a

recognition that she is inextricably part of it; a reflection on the very real way in which

(in a hyper-quick, endlessly repetitive global media portal) the real tragedies we observe

on a screen are swiftly bounded into mass-constructed narratives that fit to the rhythms of

fictional tragedy we are accustomed to consuming on our televisions and in movie

theaters. In observing the difference between the mass-mediated mourning of the

Kennedy Assassination and the September 11th attacks, both of which are often framed

within a similar national-fall-from-innocence lens, Richard Gray writes:

> The Kennedy assassination left a huge hole in the life of America […] but the period of national (and international mourning) that followed his death provided, at least, some measure of release, an appropriate catharsis. With 9/11, however, the period of commemoration has been hijacked by a series of events tied to it in rhetoric if not necessarily in reality: the "war on terror," the Patriot Act, extraordinary rendition, the invasion of Afghanistan and then Iraq. (8)

Let me put that another way: the rhetorical sweep of the symbolic life of September 11th makes objects of its observers, carrying them away in a tidal wave of wide-reaching but compact narratives. The more time passes, the more difficult it becomes to separate the moment of the attacks from the political decisions they engendered—sweeping intelligence-gathering legislation and more than a decade of war. More importantly I would argue, we cannot easily separate the attacks from the publicly-sanctioned stories that come to define the event: first-responders rushing into collapsing buildings, fire-fighters raising a flag atop the rubble, first world progress versus third world fundamentalism. Lianne feels lost to the teeming crowds of the city because, as stunned viewer, she has always already lost control of the narrative waves breaking upon her. The endless repetition and reification of the glocal media portals only amplify and solidify the process. We lose ourselves among the practiced responses, tired metaphors and well-defined taboos that emerge from the dust and rubble alongside the survivors.

But the Falling Man image cuts through this loss of self, because as I have said before, it has been earmarked as the ultimate taboo of the September 11th attacks. The interdict weighed against it also means that it resists the mainstream narrative structures attached to mass tragedy. As Junod put so well:

> From the beginning, the spectacle of doomed people jumping from the upper floors of the World Trade Center resisted redemption. They were called "jumpers" or "the jumpers," as though they represented a new lemming like class. The trial

that hundreds endured in the building and then in the air became its own kind of trial for the thousands watching them from the ground. No one ever got used to it; no one who saw it wished to see it again, although, of course, many saw it again. Each jumper, no matter how many there were, brought fresh horror, elicited shock, tested the spirit, struck a lasting blow.

Rather than the often-stultifying affect that the major narratives of any mass-media event endow, the Falling Man regenerates its horror and impact on each new viewing, reducing the observer in a crowd back to an individual, and replicates as closely as possible the mute trauma of the day in a single image. If the massive spectacle of September 11th is hypnotically sublime, the Falling Man cuts through the fascination with something so horrific it can't be bounded away in larger metaphors and stories. For Lianne, the symbolic spectre of this image haunts her in the form of a performance artist who recreates the Falling Man. Wearing a suit, the artist scales a variety of buildings in the city, suspends himself using a belt, and then jumps, free-falling through the air, until a harness and bungee stop him from hitting the ground and he holds an upside falling pose as he hangs in the air. In their most descriptive encounter, the Falling Man artist produces an intense feeling of anxiety and tension for Lianne:

> She felt her body go limp. But the fall was not the worst of it. The jolting end of the fall left him upside-down, secured to the harness, twenty feet above the pavement […] there was something awful about the stylized pose, body and limbs, his signature stroke. But the worst of it was the stillness itself and her nearness to the man, her position here, with no one closer to him than she was. She could have spoken to him but that was another plane of being, beyond reach. (168)

Aaron Mauro smartly observes that, "The capacity for world history to enter the private realm is one of the most consistent concerns of post-9/11 writing" (593), and it is especially true of DeLillo's work in this novel. The performance artist, clearly so struck

by the image of the Falling Man that he feels compelled to simulate, strikes Lianne to her

core. Where other images, stories and mythologies from September 11th leaving her

feeling faceless among a crowd of observers, the Falling Man isolates Lianne,

highlighting and reigniting her sense of "nearness" to the trauma of the day.

I would argue that Lianne's alternating sense of fascination and repulsion with the

Falling Man image – she wants to reach out and touch the other-worldly Falling Man

artist even as his performance produces in her a near anxiety attack—stems from its

function as a simplification of stories. In "Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and the Age of

Terror," Joseph M. Conte contends that terrorism is an act of narration. Much as I have

argued at the start of this chapter, Conte points to the symbolic life of an act of terrorism:

the deluge of symbols, metaphors and plotlines that coalesce to broadly define the public

understanding of the event and its cultural significance. Conte also points out that

DeLillo, in "In The Ruins of the Future," suggests that "the world narrative belongs to

terrorists" (33). Conceptualizing the attacks in narrative terms—as a competition for

voice, plot and metaphor—isn't just a gimmick to shift the context of the attacks into the

writer's wheelhouse; it is a deep recognition of one of the primary objectives of terrorism

itself: to alter or sabotage prevailing metaphors and dialogues.

The plot of *Falling Man* stretches from September 11, 2001 through the fall of

2004, the year in which Lianne reads in the newspaper that the Falling Man street artist

has died. While reading the article, Lianne, for seemingly only the second time,

encounters Richard Drew's actual Falling Man photograph:

> It hit her hard when she first saw it […] the man headlong, the towers behind him.
> The mass of the towers filled the frame of the picture. The man falling, the towers

> contiguous, she thought, behind him. The enormous soaring lines, the vertical
> column stripes. The man with blood on his shirt, she thought, or burn marks, and
> the effect of the columns behind him […] headlong freefall, she thought, and this
> picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and
> his beauty was horrific […]. It was the ideal falling motion of a body. (221-222)

For DeLillo, then, the Falling Man's cultural significance is tied directly to the binary of

its historical context and the affect felt by an observer. "The mass of the towers filled the

frame of the picture" (221), forever removing the possibility that this man's plummet can

ever be detached from September 11th. Except for the man himself, the North Towers

consumes the entirety of the frame, defining, completely, from edge to edge the mis-en-

scene. While the horror of other images, like the collapse of the towers, can be married to

other, more redemptive narratives, like the first responders who courageously ran toward

the falling buildings, the Falling Man offers nothing beyond itself: it is always singularly

a man tumbling between the smoke that forced him out of a 100th-floor window and the

awful death awaiting seconds later. And yet—*and yet*—this passage explicitly ties

together the reality of the Falling Man and the burning towers (the historical context of

the photo), with Lianne's subjective response over the course of several years (the

evolving affective response). To my mind, it is important to clarify what Lianne means. I

don't think her description of the man's fall as beautiful and heroic should be interpreted

as a recognition of the Sublime; quite the opposite, actually. The beauty of his fall, if

there is any, is that it realigns narrative control in a direct line between the subject and an

individual observer. The act of terrorism intends to create a ripple of narratives, and the

massive, media-satured glocal mediation of those narratives–and the counter-narratives

built in reaction to them–subtly push observers into silent, non-critical rhetorical poses.

The Falling Man undoes this, resisting any attempt to graft it onto larger metaphors. This

is DeLillo's point: that the image is significant, beautiful even, because it foregrounds

control of the narrative to a one-to-one ratio.

If we need simple evidence of the importance of Drew's photograph, the fact that

two prominent authors who have dealt almost solely in text-based narratives devote major

portions of their novel to a photograph, to the experience of the visual, seems significant.

Like DeLillo's *Falling* Man, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly*

Close is at times preoccupied with the Falling Man image. Mauro argues that the

foregrounding of the image by DeLillo and Safran Foer is an acknowledgement of the

importance of visuality in the contemporary media world, and in contemporary

terrorism's push to enter and re-define that media landscape:

> At the limit between the image and the imagination – between the image and the
> experience of the image – is a desire to disavow that which is terrible. Due to the
> burden of this so-called "documentary testimony" that is made so readily
> available on the internet, contemporary authors are forced to incorporate the
> visual into the textual and grapple with terrible flashes of events. (585)

And yet it should be noted that DeLillo's novel doesn't truly ask its reader to confront the

visuality of the day. It describes Richard Drew's photo, and uses its characters' reaction

to the photo as a space to mediate on the role of observation in trauma. But Drew's photo

itself is not present in the novel, and the closest that *Falling Man* comes is its paperback

cover, which depicts a blue sky above a band of clouds with a single pair of vertical black

lines down the right third of the page: an obvious visual reference to the vertical lines of

the North Tower, if not the fall of the man himself. Indeed, the words "A Novel" are

printed vertically at the top of this column of lines, reading from the top of the page

downward, creating downward movement in the reader's eye which becomes attached to the vertical lines themselves. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, on the other hand, asks its reader to directly "grapple with the terrible flashes of events" in a visual way.

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close portrays a precocious, smart nine-year old named Oskar who travels around New York investigating a kind of treasure map of clues left by his father , a victim of the towers. The Falling Man is unacknowledged for almost the entirety of the novel, until it plays a key part in the final section. Oskar finds a series of photographs of a person falling from the towers, and rearranges them in reverse like a flipbook:

> Finally, I found the pictures of the falling body. Was it Dad? Maybe. Whoever it was, it was somebody. I ripped the pages out of the book. I reversed the order, so the last one was first, and the first was last. When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky. And if I had more pictures, he would've flown through a window, back into the building, and the smoke would've poured into the hole that the plane was about the come out of. (325)

The final 15 pages of the novel replicate this flipbook, so that the reader turns through them and witnesses a body float up from the depths of nowhere, alongside a building, and ascend out of the frame of view. It should be understood that the photographs used in San Foer's novel are not those of Richard Drew, and are not really photographs, in the exact sense of the word. The copyright page claims that the image used at the end of the story is "a photo illustration based on a photograph by Lyle Owerko." Owerko, like Richard Drew, is a photographer who was on-scene and documented September 11th. So, the image used by Safran Foer is not technically The Falling Man, which is usually meant to indicate Drew's photograph of Jonathan Briley, and the conceit that it is "a photo illustration" seems designed to ward off, as much as possible, the potential for criticism

of using an actual photo of an human tumbling to their death to end a work of fiction.

And yet, as I've described before, The Falling Man is both a specific photo and a

synecdoche for all the individuals who lost their lives by jumping or falling from the

burning towers on September 11th. Using an illustrated version of a series of photographs

is an intellectual distinction, but also an aesthetic telltale. In practical effect, Safran Foer

ends his novel with a series of images of the Falling Man floating in reverse.

     Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close draws a few brief comparisons between the

Falling Man and the Tomb of the Unkown Soldier, a line of thinking evidenced even at

the end when Oskar thinks, "Was it Dad? Maybe. Whoever it was, it was somebody."

Like the Tomb, the perceived anonymity of the photograph means that it can serve as a

memorial of anyone who was lost falling or jumping out of the towers, while at the same

time noting the real experience of the individual – it *is somebody*; there is someone in the

tomb, and there is someone who was really photographed falling to their death. I think

the significance of Safran Foer's use of the image is how it signals an aesthetic agency

within the author, and perhaps, the reader. In *Falling Man*, Lianne never feels in control

of her response to the grief and horror of the attacks. The closest she comes is to feel that

she can separate her feelings of grief from the choreographed mass narratives of sorrow

when she encounters the Falling Man. And yet, Conte intelligently notes that the novel as

whole does assert a sense of control over the dystopian images of burning buildings and

tumbling humans. The story starts with Keith walking away from the collapsed tower,

and doesn't return to the scene until the very end, when it picks up just before the crash

and then follows an injured Keith as he makes his way out of the smoldering tower.

Conte writes: "*Temporally*, the novel ends slightly before it begins, with Keith fleeing the north tower, so that by violating in his fictional narrative the inexorable forward thrust of events that comprises history, DeLillo can reexamine the motives of the terrorists and the experience of the survivors" (568). In other words, by rearranging the chronology of the book, DeLillo finds a pathway to investigate and examine that which seems inexorable. Safran Foer's novel ends in the same manner. He is never able to remove the Falling Man from the context of September 11th; as I've said before, the image is irreducibly linked to its historical context. That remains unchanged here; it is not a flipbook of a man floating through the sky, it is a flipbook of a man floating back up into the sky and – if more photos existed – back into the window from which he exited. But in reversing the chronology of the photos, and thereby reversing the chronology of events, Safran Foer is visually laying claim to the role of aesthetics in this kind of mass trauma: to create space for agency when there is none.

A primary feature of the Sublime is the sense of awe it instills, leaving the viewer dumbstruck. And indeed, "powerless" is perhaps the most apt descriptor for those who witnessed the September 11th attacks from a distance, whether that distance is a few blocks in midtown Manhattan or the screen of a television. In either case, there was little more for most people to do than watch in mute horror as something unmanageably big occurred. But for authors concerned with the symbology and narratives that emerge from September 11th, re-arranging the symbols associated with the attacks, or using them to craft a different impact, signifies the cultural space allotted to art and literature in responding to instances of lived terror, destruction and mass death. The symbols cannot

be removed from their historical context, but they can be rearranged to create spaces for reflection, insight or healing where all that previously existed was terror. In this manner, I think narratives born of terrorism hold a special place in the genre of contemporary dystopian literature.

In the following chapter, I argue that stories of future dystopian societies which resemble, but are not exactly the same as our own, create a sense of defamiliarization that allows for critical analysis. The dystopian imagery related to terrorism cannot be unbound from its lived, historical reality. But those images can be repurposed within the context of the history to offer agency for authors and observers, and to create new spaces for healing and reflection. The writers in this chapter work to repurpose the symbology of terrorism in ways that allow those who bear witness to reclaim some agency amidst feelings of powerlessness. The next chapter features writers influenced by the symbols and imagery from September 11th, but who use these symbols to analyze the cultures of pain, paranoia and fatalism that grew out of the attacks.

CHAPTER THREE

DYSTOPIAN GLOBAL CONFLICT AND MASS DESTRUCTION

For much of the decade after September 11th, contemporary dystopian fiction is

set against the backdrop of the attacks and suffused with the vocabulary and imagery of

urban terrorism. More than that, dystopian texts reflect the paranoid Western culture that

grew out of the attacks: Color-coded terror warnings, talks of biological warfare, shoe

bombs, airport profiling, two foreign wars, and The Patriot Act. Acts of terrorism have a

symbolic life long after the actual violence, and the September 11th attacks imbued our

culture with a deeper anxiety of our own annihilation. Dystopian fiction manifests that

fear in stories and landscapes of ruin. Abandoned cities, decimated buildings and

cataclysmic decline feature prominently in a host of critically and popularly revered

contemporary texts—from film (*The Matrix, Snowpiercer*), to television (*The Walking

Dead*), to video games (*The Last of Us*). These cauterized terrains embody the social and

political decline so many dystopian texts describe, and foreground a unique engagement

with the global culture of anxiety and paranoia created during the War on Terror decade.

The destruction wrought on family units in these texts also speaks to a dialogue with the

global. As critics of globalization raise important concerns about population growth,

migration, and scarce resources, the disassembling and rebuilding of families in

dystopian environments stands in for the interaction that individuals and small groups

have with the global community in a paranoid time. This engagement underpins Alfonso

Cuarón's 2006 film *Children of Men*, Danny Boyle's 2002 zombie redux film *28 Days*

Later, and Cormac McCarthy's 2006 apocalyptic novel *The Road.* In *Children of Men*,

worldwide infertility and war form the backdrop for a story of an under-resourced society

facing its own mortality. *28 Days Later* utilizes the zombie horror genre as a metaphor

for mass infection and biological warfare in the post-September 11th global community.

The Road, meanwhile, depicts characters who struggle with the complete loss of

organizing systems—governments, religious institutions and nuclear families—in the

face of an unknown worldwide disaster. In focusing their stories on small groups of

survivors who form improvised domestic units, Cuarón, Boyle and McCarthy position the

family as a counterbalance to a myriad of dystopian global crises.

28 Days Later: Viral Capitalism and Terror Psychology

Danny Boyle's 2002 film *28 Days Later* utilizes a direct metaphor of infection

and plague in contemporary London and its outlying communities to develop a critical

exploration of millennial consumer identity, global media and the social experience of

terrorism. In Boyle's vision, Jim, a twenty-something bicycle courier, awakens from a

coma to find himself locked inside a hospital room. He escapes to the deserted, dystopian

landscape of an uninhabited London populated solely by a few survivors and "the

infected": humans plagued by a virus synthesized from the emotional and physical

experience of rage. The infected shake in painful spasms, vomit blood, and violently

attack the remaining uninfected. The infected don't fit the technical definition of "living-

dead" zombification, but zombie narratives are the clear reference point for the film; the

infected—wracked by a man-made, biological compound—are contemporary zombies:

infected against their will and consumed entirely by the virus.

Narratives of plagues and mass infections have a long literary history, stretching from contemporary zombie stories and HIV narratives, to the Black Death in Medieval Europe, and back to the "Plague of Athens" that Thucydides describes in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. In these narratives, plagues and widespread disease often serve literal and abstract purposes: the texts document the lived experience of mass infection— the fear, sweeping confusion and voluminous death. At the same time, literature frequently uses plague stories as metaphors for wholesale social upheaval, where the tumultuous experience of mass disease marks the before and after of a society in the process of social and political changes that are antagonized by the experience of a plague. Tony Kushner's fantasia *Angels in America*, for example, both depicts the fear and loss endemic to the AIDS epidemic among a group of New Yorkers, while also using the pandemic to mark the transition between Reaganism's grip on the American psyche in the 1980s to an anticipated political and social restoration in the 1990s.[1]

Contemporary literature and film about zombies, especially stories centered in major urban areas and cities with global profiles, emerge from this history of plague narratives. In *From Early Modern Plagues to Postmodern Zombies*, Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz note the special significance of London as the setting for a story of mass infection. Beginning in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century, popular plague narratives frequently took their inspiration from the rapid and mass destruction of the Black Death: a series of outbreaks of bubonic plague in Europe and Western Asia that killed between

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[1]Indeed, the second book of the play, *Perestroika*, is named for the reformation of the Soviet Union after the fall of the U.S.S.R., and literally means "restructuring."

75 and 200 million people, decimating a third of Europe's population and deeply

affecting the social psyche of its people.[2] Boluk and Lenz argue that plague narratives set

in London in the 17th Century use the Black Death as a metaphor for the emergence of

capitalist markets that crossed many communities, upending mercantile trade and

instituting a system of accumulated wealth.[3] Using Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* and

Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, they contend that infection signals not just

disease, but also a society engulfed by a new sense of consumption, prosperity and

wealth. They then suggest that the link between metaphors of infection and capitalism

endure, to varying degrees, through Modernity, with contemporary zombie films, such as

28 Days Later, Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* and George Romero's entire zombie

cannon of the 1970s specifically connecting zombie plagues to global capitalism:

> In the same way these plague works describe a relationship between the spread of
> plague and the spread of capitalism, so too does the viral zombie serve as an
> allegorized figure of capital. In one respect, the zombie-as-critique-of-capital
> motif is an argument that has been well rehearsed by scholars, and the critique of
> consumption and contemporary life is made explicit in Romero's *Dawn of the
> Dead* (1978). Zombies are pure desiring machines—they are creatures composed
> entirely of excess desire. They hunger for flesh, but their undead status means
> they do not require food. This excess, first exemplified in Romero's films, is
> didactically harnessed as a metaphor for consumption since the sole purpose of
> the zombie is to satisfy an urge unmotivated by any physical need. (135-136)

Similarly, Sarah Lauro and Karen Embry argue that the enduring popularity and

fascination with zombies as monsters is rooted in the particular threat the infected living-

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[2]The most devastating outbreak of the Black Death occurred in the Fourteenth Century, between
1348 and 1350. But distinct outbreaks reoccurred throughout Europe for the next several centuries, with
different degrees of mortality. The Great Plague of London – which Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year
documents – killed upwards of 100,000 people in the city, reducing its population by about 15%. See: "The
Great Plague of London" – Wikipedia entry.

[3]See also: "Black Death," by Katherine Park, *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease.*

dead pose: to both end our lives, but also to end our consciousness, and transform us into another member of the shuffling, non-living, non-thinking horde. Zombies have no personal identity; they are folded into groups—*The* zombies, or *The* infected—and therefore serve as an obvious metaphor for Marxist critiques of consumer culture: "What Horkiemer and Adorno and others illustrate is that the illusory separation of subject and object, the *fata morgana* of individualism, keeps happy the camp of zombies – the slaves to capitalism who are merely deluded into thinking they are free" (92). That is, as an inherently dichotmomous creature (living but not conscious, dead but not at rest) the zombie mirrors the slippage between subject and object in millennial capitalism, where Marxists argue that production (labor) and consumption (buyer) have blurred irreparably into one.

Boyle's *28 Days Later* picks up this motif and connects it directly to the forces and effects of globalization, while arguably advancing the critique of capitalism to its furthest point. Romero's films present a clear commentary on commodity culture – particularly 1978's *Dawn of the Dead*, in which a group of survivors lock themselves in a shopping mall to escape hordes of reanimated zombies, and the mindless consumption of flesh reflects the mindless consumption of goods available to the survivors in the mall. The infected in *28 Days Later*, meanwhile, spread the plague of rage, and are clearly positioned within the broader literary and cinematic context of zombies as all-consuming, "pure desiring machines"; indeed, in Boyle's film, the infected are not defeated in a psychical or militarized confrontation, but only when they die out from starvation. That is, once there is nothing left to consume, the infected lose the ability to replicate and

eventually die. As both a metaphor and a species, the zombies in *28 Days Later* are

predicated on a cycle of perpetual ingestion and reproduction.

But where Lauro and Embry position the zombie as metaphor for the overlapping

of subject and object, *28 Days Later* presents what I consider a contemporary critique of

the very *distance* between production and consumption in the globalized economy. From

the start, the film makes obvious the uselessness of money in a dystopian landscape.

When Jim initially escapes the hospital, he's narrowly saved from a pack of the infected

by two other survivors, Selena and Mark, who provide the back story of the mass

infection and terror for Jim and the audience at large. Mark describes going to the airport

with his family to try to buy their way onto a plane and out of England:

> **Mark:** I remember my dad had all this cash, even though cash was completely
> useless […] I remember the ground was soft. I looked down and I was standing on
> all these people, like a carpet. No one could run, all you could do was climb,
> climb over more people.

In the chaos of the infection, money loses the power invested in it, a point underscored

even more directly when Jim and Selena partner with Frank and Hannah, a father-

daughter living in a London flat, after Mark is killed. Hearing a radio broadcast from

British soldiers claiming to have "the answer to infection," they travel to a blockade

outside of Manchester in the hopes of finding safety or even salvation. On the journey,

they stop at an abandoned grocery store, where they gleefully fill their carts with food,

candy and liquor, and exit as Frank leaves his credit card near the cash register in ironic

tones of laughter. As with cash, Frank's credit—the account of his debt and borrowing

power from the economic system—is rendered irrelevant in a dystopian world filled with

infected hordes of zombie-like people. Even as the infected themselves symbolize

mindless consumption, the frenzy and violence of their desire renders the system obsolete.

It is vital, however, to note that Jim, Selena, Frank and Hannah are forced to flee London not only because of the immediate danger of the infected, but also because they can no longer care for themselves amidst the collapsed social and civic services. When clean water and indoor plumbing are no longer available, Frank hordes the water collected in his toilet, and unsuccessfully attempts to trap clean water from dew under plastic sheets on his roof—a trick he witnessed on television at some point, but is unable to replicate. When they storm the grocery store they can only take eradiated, canned or non-perishable food that doesn't require cooking. Much later, once they have arrived at the blockade, a British soldier attempts to prepare them a meal, but they find that the eggs have gone bad, despite the salt used to mask their flavor. Taken together, these scenes paint a larger critique: these first-world survivors are almost solely consumers, and they only survive because of their ability to scrounge for things they once were able to purchase. Due both to the circumstances of the infection and their lack of skills, they are unable to produce fresh food or clean water for themselves. It is only at the very end of the film, when Jim, Selena and Hannah live in a small farm cottage, that the viewer is given hope for rescue, and that hope only comes once it is implied that the trio are living and caring entirely for themselves—that they have become self-sustaining. Rather than explore an evaporating distinction between subject and object, the film focuses on a widening distance between production and consumption in the global economy. When the social systems designed to ensure public safety, food delivery and other basic needs

collapse, the space between consumption and cultivation reveal how much the global

production economy separates its subjects from any agency in their own survival.

As I noted earlier, Boluk and Lenz persuasively argue that "to situate a cinematic

narrative of zombie infection in London is to locate it within the city's history of plague."

But I want to suggest that the contemporary zombie/plague narrative is underwritten by

intersecting global forces separate (or at least irreducible solely to) economics and

capital. In fact, *28 Days Later* seems primarily concerned with the speed of travel and

contact (and thus, communicability), and the growing fear of biological terrorism during

the War on Terror. Even if we see the zombies as global citizens riven by the inexorable

and unstoppable march of global capital, we shouldn't miss the marks of other

contemporary fears that are foregrounded the film. More importantly, it is essential to

recognize that over the course of the film, *28 Days Later* becomes less focused on the

infected—in their experience or the threat they pose to the survivors—and increasingly

interested in the social system from which they emerged, and within which the remaining

survivors exist. As with Romero's films, and in keeping with the social criticism

embedded in dystopian stories, the zombies in Boyle's movie are ancillary to the larger

commentary their presence facilitates. Boluk and Lenz write:

> *28 Days Later* opens with a […] self-referential gesture: upon entering the
> laboratory, the activists discover chimpanzees being subjected to a *Clockwork
> Orange*-style barrage of violent news footage, the implication being that the
> violent imagery infects the animals with humanity's desire to destroy itself. (133)

The barrage of images displayed before the chimpanzees are not only violent, but also

representative of the present, encompassing any number of scenes a viewer could expect

to encounter on a world news broadcast: visions of impoverished and dirty mobs clashing

with police clad in riot gear; mothers wailing over sickly children, violent explosions in

unnamed, far-away countries. The inequalities between first and third world, class

violence, and religious and xenophobic are beamed directly into the minds of the infected

chimpanzees via television broadcasts in *28 Days Later:*

Figure 3. A laboratory chimpanzee is forced to watch images of global rioting and
violence in the opening sequence of *28 Days Later*

The point here is that this scene evokes the cyclical nature of global media.

Images of humanity's own crises are reciprocated back to us in 24-hour cycles, thus

furthering the crises they are reporting. The technology and narratives endemic to

globalization are the infecting agents for a plague that consumes the modern world,

offering a bleak conclusion: The contemporary world is self-consuming *and* self-

infecting.

But perhaps the most salient feature of *28 Days Later* is the way the film is

infused by the psychology of terrorism and fear I described at the start of this chapter.

Aesthetically, the differences between the zombies of Romero's films and Boyle's work

are speed and violence. Romero's zombies eat their victims, but they also lurch about

without coordination, and shuffle after potential victims, allowing the infected to survive

if they can move quickly. Boyle's infected hordes, however, are shockingly fast, chasing down fit survivors in their mid-to-late twenties. In one scene, as Frank, Hannah, Jim and Selena change a flat tire while stuck in a tunnel, the infected race through the tunnel, nearly chasing down the car the survivors speed away in. When a victim is caught by the infected, they are met with bites, savage blows to the head, and infected blood that is vomited onto their faces. Within 20-30 seconds, a victim becomes engorged with rage, and begins chasing down new victims with the same malice as the other infected. The relative speed—of the infected themselves, of the spread of the virus—underscores the virulence of contact and movement in the globalized world. And on a literal level, the rapid spread of a constructed virus speaks directly to the pervasive fear of a bio-chemical agent spreading rapidly through an urban community.

The manufactured virus in *28 Days Later* combines twin anxieties—of an epidemic of disease, and of a dangerous bio-chemical weapon—and pairs them with scenery and imagery associated with the War on Terror. The tagline in the original ad campaign for the film was: "Day 1: Exposure -- Day 3: Infection – Day 8: Epidemic – Day 15: Evacuation – Day 20: Devastation." Similarly, *28 Weeks Later*, the extremely underrated 2007 sequel which Boyle produced, was advertised with the following posters:

Figure 4. Posters for *28 Weeks Later*

The red and black background in the first image is offset by a white biohazard sign, which makes a re-appearance in the mouth guard worn by the woman in the second image. After several years of news broadcasts, anthrax-laced letters, and color-coded threat indices, the biohazard symbol is immediately familiar to anyone aware of international concerns tied to bioterrorism, a frame of mind reinforced by the tagline "It's Back. Everywhere May 11," which conveys the release date with terminology that underscores the fear specific to bio-warfare: that a disease or chemical agent can instantly be "Everywhere," and that "There is no escape."

The original *28 Days Later* is best known among casual viewers for its opening sequence, in which a bewildered Jim wanders through an abandoned London after waking up from his coma:

Figure 5. Opening sequence in *28 Days Later*

It is a stark scene, certainly, but also one immediately recognizable as a reference

to Manhattan on September 11th, or London on July 7th, 2005 after the bus and train

bombings. The evacuated streets, the abandoned cars, the paper and debris littering the

street are all evocative of the immediate aftermath of actual terrorist attacks. As Jim

reaches the center of town, he finds a statue with hundreds of letters and photos pleading

for help in locating loved ones, an image which mirrors the countless impromptu

monuments filled with similar images in New York in the days after September 11th.

Both films, but *28 Days Late*r in particular, make heavy use of this kind of

imagery, invoking the ingrained cultural memory of an audience literate in the lived

experience of terrorism. In one sense, this gives the disaster scenarios in the films more

emotional weight, as the plague of the infected is backlit by the trope of terrorism. More

subtly, though, the films invoke the memory of actual events to sharpen the social

commentary being constructed. In *The Aesthetics of Risk in Dawn of the Dead and 28*

Days Later, John Carroll writes:

> However, *28 Days Later* is firmly ensconced within a risk society in which public institutions are unable and, increasingly, unwilling to predict or insure against the disasters the film alludes to, including the rapid spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and the AIDS pandemic. (46)

Carroll's point is that the film utilizes the outbreak of a dystopian plague to better articulate a critique of culture well-versed in its own real disasters. More specifically, he is trying to describe the psychological damage that repeated widespread traumas cause to a community. The global world, versed in the anxieties of terrorism, bio-chemical danger and recurring disaster is figured as a society in perpetual anticipation of the next disaster—one that may as yet be undefined, but is certain to emerge nonetheless. In naming the culture in *28 Days Later* a "risk society," Carroll underscores a theme repeated endlessly in the film: that danger is ever-present, and that social institutions and authority figures are either unable to protect citizens from the threats they represent, or that some institutions may be just as dangerous as the as the looming outside threat.

In the moments after meeting Selena and Mark while he wanders through the abandoned and dystopian London, Jim begins to ask what the government is doing to combat the outbreak of plague.

> **Jim:** What about the government? What are they doing?
> **Selena:** There is no government.
> **Jim:** Of course there's a government! There's always a government! They're in a… a bunker, or a plane.
> **Mark:** No. There's no government. No army. No police. No TV, no radio, no electricity. You're the first uninfected person we've seen in six days.
> **Jim:** What about your family?
> **Mark:** They're dead. So is Selena's.
> **Selena:** And yours will be dead too.

The flat declarations about the government's demise is both realistic for a set of characters living through a widespread disaster that has killed every other person they

know, but also indicative of a pervasive disregard for systems of authority that are entrusted with protecting civilians; a distrust that is on full display in the very first scene in the film, in which a government laboratory is identified as the place where the rage virus was synthesized, and where a group of animal rights activists accidentally unleash it as they try to free the caged lab animals. From the start, individuals and social systems are positioned antagonistically. Nowhere is this more pressing than in the last third of the film, in which Jim, Selena and Hannah arrive at the military blockade in search of "the answer to infection" (Frank is infected and dies shortly after arriving). The survivors find a group of British soldiers camped in a country estate that they have wired with security systems. Initially, soldiers and their commander purport to be rebuilding society as they wait for the infected to starve out. But the situation devolves quickly, as the soldiers become fascistic – attempting to murder Jim, and sexually assault Selena and Hannah. In a telling move, the infected are removed from the film's primary focus during its last third, as they present a second, ancillary danger to the threat posed to the survivors by the soldiers who claim to be protectors. A similar theme arises throughout the whole of *28 Weeks Later*, which follows a young brother and sister, along with a nurse and a single soldier as they must evade both the infected, and American military forces that are trying to hunt them down to contain the infection. The two films' pervasive distrust of social systems and authority groups informs its portrayal of government as over-powerful, aggressive and dangerous to survivors, while simultaneously feckless in its ability to protect its own citizens from disaster.

  28 Days Later is not a hopeless film, however. Despite the devastating setbacks

the survivor group experiences, the film ends on an optimistic note, as Selena, Hannah

and Jim – now living together in a farm cottage – signal planes that fly overhead. Though

brief, the scene, and the cottage in particular, have an unmistakable tone of domesticity:

of an improvised family that the survivors cobble together in the face of all their traumas.

The survivors in *28 Days Later* band together to form a family unit. In a moment of rest,

Selena and Jim reflect on the father-daughter relationship that sustains Frank and Hannah

trough the crisis:

> **Jim:** Do you know what I was thinking?
> **Selena:** You were thinking that you'll never hear another piece of original music ever again. You'll never read a book that hasn't already been written or see a film that hasn't already been shot.
> **Jim:** Um, that's what you were thinking.
> **Selena:** No, I was thinking I was wrong.
> **Jim:** About what?
> **Selena:** All the death, all the shit, it doesn't really matter to Frank and Hannah, because …well, she's got her dad and he's got his daughter. So I was wrong when I said staying alive is as good as it gets.
> **Jim:** See, that's what I was thinking.

Where do individuals in dystopian societies filled with external threats and collapsing

social institutions turn? *Inward.* They either preserve the small families that have

survived in the face of the disasters, or cobble together new families from the remnants of

the ruin. The prevailing motif, in *Children of Men* and *28 Days Later*, is that when larger

social systems are under attack, or are themselves threatening, individuals need to build

smaller family units to buttress themselves against the anxieties of capital, terrorism and

bio-chemical attacks endemic to global conflict.

Children of Men: Cultural Ruin and the Loss of Belief

Released in 2006, Cuarón's *Children of Men* adapts the characters and basic premise of P.D. James' 1992 novel of the same name, but alters the plot, ending, and tone significantly enough to be considered its own artistic and intellectual statement. The film depicts England in 2027 clinging to the last vestiges of Twentieth Century Western society. Humanity has been rendered completely infertile for 18-plus years, and the prospect of total species extinction has pushed most of the world to chaos. On televisions inside trains and buses, a list of world cities—New York, Rio de Jeneiro, Tokyo, Moscow—plays over corresponding images of fire, looting, riot police and widespread destruction. "The world has collapsed," the viewer is told, and "Only Britain soldiers on." But the England presented to the viewer is characterized by the work of defamiliarization so common to dystopian stories. Cuarón opens on a scene of people huddled in a cafe, watching a news report of the death of the world's youngest man, "Baby Diego," a man of eighteen and some months. While most watch in hushed dismay, Theo Faron pushes his way through the crowd, buys a coffee without responding with much emotion to the news, and exits. As the camera follows him through the door, it pans across a scene of a busy street in "London, 2027," and at first blush it appears as one might expect a first world city to appear twenty years in the future: industrialized buildings line bustling streets, modified cars zip around pedestrians, and large video screens play advertisements and news reports are directly attached to building facades. But after this momentary familiarity, subtle cues of decay become more pronounced: trash bags and filth line the streets, and as Theo stops at a mailbox to put sugar in his coffee, his shabby clothes and

unshaven face are evident. More than anything, the film is drenched in grays and washed out greens, sucking any vibrancy from the frame. Cuarón pauses just long enough for the viewer to begin analyzing the industrial scene, before a bomb blast rips through the cafe Theo just exited, distorting the sound to a few screams and an increasingly loud ringing tone. As a woman emerges through the dust holding her dismembered arm left arm in her right hand, the screen cuts to a title card.

The entire opening is just over two minutes long, but effectively establishes the narrative context of the film: the setting is both familiar and discrepant, the trash and sunken colors amid the faded technologies hint at what the explosion makes jarringly clear: that chaos and decay are bubbling through the facade of an advanced society. More than that, the opening scene serves an important meta-function; the bomb explosion is shocking and unexpected, intentionally counterposed to the stereotypical rhythm of violence or destruction to which film-goers are accustomed. Cuarón's opening sets the precedent that viewer expectations will be upended, in effect leaving those who are watching the film as uneasy as we soon discover the characters to be.

Pervasive uneasiness—from within and from the global community outside—is a defining characteristic of the English society presented in *Children of Men*. Cuarón creates this effect through a number of techniques. One of the most startling and effective, to my mind, is his use of extended tracking shots. In three portions of the film, the camera films the action in a continued sequence of more than three minutes with no breaks, cuts or edits. The longest, at more than six minutes, is recognized by the American Film Institute as one of the longest unbroken sequences in recorded film. These

shots are used during scenes of violence, action or heavy military fighting, and are absent of any soundtrack. They disallow normal cinematic breaks in continuity, forcing the viewer to experience the mis-en-scene at the same level, pacing and intensity as the characters.

The point of these techniques is not just cinematic showmanship, but rather to create an atmospheric tension that mirrors the social and political tensions of the English society in the story. Humankind has been infertile for eighteen years and immigration to England is illegal. A group of anti-government activists has discovered an immigrant, Kee, who is miraculously pregnant. The group enlists Theo to help them smuggle her out of the country and to the Human Project, a rumored sanctuary community where artists, doctors, musicians, philosophers and politicians have fled to rebuild the world. Theo comes to distrust the activists, and attempts to smuggle Kee and her unborn baby out of the country on his own. As Theo and Kee move to avoid capture by the government or the activists, the viewer gets a more complete view of England in 2027. In London, captured illegals are caged along the street as they await deportation. Rampant unemployment means certain foods are scarce. Bands of thieves live in the unprotected countryside, while the outskirts of the British island are used as refugee camps that have become de facto ghettos for deported illegals. Activist groups are constantly pushing a violent uprising against the British government, funneling weapons into the immigrant ghettos. Again and again, the social strife and decay depicted in the films comes as a direct response or illustration of many concerns that contemporary globalization theorists have vocalized.

For example, in a documentary produced in tandem with the DVD release of Cuarón's film, Fabrizo Eva, an Italian lecturer on human geography and sociologist Saskia Sassen both preface their response to *Children of Men* by arguing that the central challenge to nations in a globalized world is migration (*The Possibility of Hope)*. Rather than a cosmopolitan movement of leisure, travel and cultural exchange, they contend that an inequality in the availability of scarce resources and opportunities drives migration in the global community, pushing encounters between disparate peoples in the dash for resources and prosperity. In the same documentary, Bulgarian philosopher Tzvetan Todorov supports the conclusions of Eva and Sassen, and contends that *Children of Men* provides a critical depiction of two major facets of globalization: First, he argues that the globalized world pits individuals against major institutional forces, such as governments. In the film, the activist group that originally discovers Kee's pregnancy goes by the moniker The Fishes, and though his ex-wife Julian is a member and he is likely sympathetic to their politics, Theo is spiteful towards The Fishes because of the bombs they have set off while targeting government officials and buildings (indeed, they are probably responsible for the very bomb in the coffee shop at the start of the film). Throughout the film, the corruption that runs through The Fishes organization is slowly revealed, even as the film shows the many ways in which they are merely responding to government atrocities. The film is less interested in identifying one side as more or less at fault than the other, than it is in making the argument that pitting individuals against large-scale institutions and the vast resources they possess almost necessarily pushes the individuals and small groups to extremism.

Todorov's second thesis is that an "acceleration of contact" in the global community not only forces disparate peoples to come into contact with one another more frequently, but also to force them into close physical proximity, making the differences between the groups—in politics, wealth, access to resources, religious beliefs—that much more stark and combustible. Todorov's thesis is echoed in interview comments from *The Shock Doctrine* author Naomi Klein:

> I think we've abandoned a notion of development, which is about steady progress that involves building infrastructure, putting in phones lines, electricity, water, building schools, more and more [...] what I see is what I call the Global Green Zone, where you have a sort of bubble, where the internationals are. Instead of infrastructure, you have an absolute kind of apartheid system, where the people with the generators, water, cell phones and an expensive, privatized infrastructure are surrounded by this chaos. (*The Possibility of Hope*)

Klein's claim that global migration produces a system that resembles apartheid is very reminiscent of the ghettoizing seen in *Children of Men*. London and its surrounding areas are locked down, and any perceived threat to this community is pushed to "refugee camps" on the outskirts of the British island, where they live in crowded, abject poverty. The differences in the lives of those within the bubble of London, and those on the edges is the difference between those who are protected by the last remaining system of wealth and power, and the overwhelming number of those who are still disaffected by it. A great deal of the social and physical disrepair is positioned as a dystopian imagining of a world subject to the extremes of forced migration and compelled to fight for increasingly scarce resources.

Children of Men also presents a picture of a society subjected to the essential feature of dystopianism: the loss of belief. Specifically, I argue that the most pressing loss

experienced by the society in Cuarón's story is the loss of hope for a future, to the degree that characters frequently question whether it is worth even fighting to stay alive. As mentioned, the plot suggests that humanity has suffered from infertility for eighteen years, but also makes clear that there is no known cause for the infertility. More importantly, barely a few minutes is given in the entire film to speculating about the cause of the infertility. Nicole LaRose writes that: "Cuarón's film can be read as an anti-detective story because its refusal of causation and thus a villain extends the narrative beyond the teleology of the detective genre" (6). Put differently, the film refuses to focus on the mystery of "what happened?" as its central drama. Rather than cause, the focus becomes consequence, as the results of the decades-long infertility recur again and again. For the society at large, the loss of a literal future for the species produces a nearly absolute loss of hope or belief in the present. In an early scene, Theo visits his friend Jasper and the two references the "Quietus"—boxed suicide pills that the government is selling—indicating that so many feel hopelessness for future, that the government is helping them actively erase the present.

Moreover, Cuarón fills *Children of Men* with a myriad of visual cues that speak to the pervasive loss of hope by referencing real-life events that produced mass feelings of loss or despair. After "Baby Diego" dies, thousands lay flowers outside a hotel gate in a makeshift memorial, in what is a clear reference to the national grieving that followed Princess Diana's in England, and the memorial that thousands visited with flowers outside the gates at Kensington and Buckingham Palace:

Figure 6. Flowers at Buckingham Palace for Princess Diana's funeral

Figure 7. Flowers for "Baby Diego" in *Children of Men*

Other clear visual references to the evacuation of Jewish ghettos in WWII, abuses at Abu Ghraib and a myriad other instances of national tragedy or shame are peppered throughout the film. An audience literate in these visual cues would immediately understand the kind of widespread feelings of loss, shame or hopelessness that these

images denote. More than most, Theo, who lost a young son to an influenza outbreak—

seems to embody and typify a kind of hollowness. As LaRose notes:

> We come to understand Theo as the already dead throughout the film as he transgresses boundaries. He begins as a sort of living dead, existing in a state of apathy; he transitions to an oppositional life as he surveys forms of failed leftist rebellion; finally, he becomes the already dead by revealing new theoretical understandings realized through a Utopian form of elective kinship. (9)

Theo's relationships to Kee and Jasper certainly reawaken his sense of community, but I

think LaRose goes too far in declaring elective kinship to be a kind of utopia. Rather, I

think Cuarón takes the more subtle step of depicting a small reawakening of hope in

Theo. Kee's baby provides a very literal hope for a future to human species, one where,

theoretically, Theo might be able to find a new partner and have children once again. But

as he sacrifices his life at the end of the film to deliver Kee and her baby to the

rendezvous with the Human Project, Theo invests in a different kind of hope. The

meeting happens on a boat in the ocean just outside the walls of the refugee camp. When

the Human Project boat arrives, Theo dies as explosions and fighting are heard over the

city walls. Theo positions himself as a bridge between two worlds. The din of the old

world destroying itself can be heard in the background, while the baby for the future is

passed to representatives of a new community. Theo can find hope and purpose in his

role as an interlocutor, but also sacrifices his life in the transition from a community

riddled with dystopian fears to a community that represents the hope of a future.

The Road: Social Decay and the Family as a System

Like *Children of Men* and *28 Days Later*, Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*

depicts the collapse of society amidst dystopian conflict. And in much the same manner

as the two films, *The Road* repeatedly insists on the importance of small family units –

sometimes naturally occurring, sometimes improvised – in the face of global disaster. But

where the society in Cuarón's film still had some vestiges of its former glory, and where

28 Days Later depicts a society just weeks into a cataclysmic trauma, the world that

McCarthy describes is one of nearly complete apocalypse. A father and son travel along a

road from the mid-south of the United States to the southeastern coast, hoping to stay

warm during the winter.[4] The world around them has been completely leveled: There is

no government or institutions of authority, there are almost no communities or cities,

most major landmarks have been completely erased from the earth, and the light from the

sun is perpetually dimmed from the ashen dust that hovers in the sky and covers

everything. Gangs of cannibals roam the roads during the day. There is no natural

growth, little clean water, and certainly nothing approaching electricity. McCarthy

describes:

> Cauterized terrain [...] where all was burnt to ash before them no fires were to be
> had and the nights were long and dark and cold beyond anything they'd yet
> encountered. Cold to crack the stones. To take your life. He [the Man] held the
> boy shivering against him and counted each frail breath in the blackness. (13)

As *Children of Men* gave few clues as to the cause of its global infertility, so too

McCarthy offers scant explanation as to the cause of the destruction. The Man has only a

snippet memory of "A long shear of light and a series of low concussions" (45), a

description detailed enough to raise suspicions of some kind of cataclysmic explosion,

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[4]There are a number of clues to suggest that the Man and Boy start out somewhere near Knoxville, TN and travel south and east, finally ending on a beach in the Carolinas. Wesley Morgan from the University of Tennessee has a detailed retracing of the book's many locales, and argues that the Man and Boy begin in Middleboro, KY, before descending into Knoxville. Morgan suggests their journey may end on a southern beach in North Carolina. There is some debate among readers as to whether the pair ends up north or south of Charleston, SC, but the book does not offer enough clues for a definitive answer. They do, undoubtedly, end the journey somewhere along the Carolina-Georgia coast, against the Atlantic.

but too general to draw any specific conclusions. A global weapon, a nuclear meltdown

or an asteroid are all plausible hypotheses, but impossible to prove, and the question of

whether the "series of low concussions" are the cause of the destruction or an effect of its

source remain. In short, McCarthy and Cuarón both move their audience away from an

investigation of what caused widespread social collapse, and onto a rumination of what

the consequences of the apocalyptic event reflect on humanity.

Even if *The Road* is far less direct in identifying a cause for the ruin it depicts,

McCarthy still sets his vision of apocalyptic destruction against the same backdrop as

Cuarón and Boyle: a contemporary culture awestruck by real scenes of destruction and

paranoid of its own annihilation. Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz writes that:

> No historical period has witnessed such an eruption of end-of-the-world images
> and narratives as the beginning of the new millennium. [Contemporary] books
> and movies […] are all seen to tap into our collective unconscious and that
> suppressed fear of what may hide beneath the extremely fragile veneer of
> civilization that has so far kept us from global annihilation. […] As explained
> earlier on, *The Road* does not reveal a precise explanation of the origin of the
> worldwide cataclysm; yet, there are some tangential references and religious
> undertones that can easily be linked to our present-day realities. (88)

Widespread cultural paranoia has informed the context of McCarthy's contemporary

work, both in *The Road*, and in his 2005 novel *No Country for Old Men*, in which an

unrelenting psychopath leaves a trail of death and destruction across the Texas-Mexico

border as he tracks a man who has stolen a satchel of money from a botched drug deal.

Francisco Collado-Rodriguez points out:

> In a period significantly characterized by the posttraumatic collective sense that
> followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks and by ecological fears concerning global
> warming, McCarthy has written two novels framed in different narrative genres
> using very distinct styles […} both novels warn readers about the necessity of
> questioning the power of storytelling, and above all they offer an understanding of

the individual self and our civilization as structurally traumatized, with the implication that some moral issues should be reconsidered if the human species is to survive. Although violence has always been a reiterative theme in McCarthy's fiction, in the two novels under scrutiny the topic is openly connected to collective devastating results. (49)

Which is to say that even in *No Country for Old Men*, set in the 1980s and featuring a relatively small cast of characters, the spiraling, expansive nature of the violence and destruction takes the post-September 11th cultural trauma as its reference point. And while the cause of the apocalyptic destruction in *The Road* is never fully revealed, readers immediately recognize the tone of the book, and the nature of the existential anxiety it explores as fundamentally contemporary and emerging from the traumas of the new millennium.

The Road *is also nostalgic, to a degree. Characters look back to a lost society that was almost immeasurably better than the landscape they inhabit:

> The boy clung to him. They moved away and he tried to find a clear space in the darkness but finally he put down the tarp and they just sat and pulled the blankets over them and he held the boy against him. The whump of the falling trees and the low boom of the loads of snow exploding on the ground set the woods to shuddering. He held the boy and told him it would be all right and that it would stop soon and after a while it did. The dull bedlam dying in the distance and again, solitary and far away. Then nothing. (82)

The earth is not just cauterized and scarred by what has happened; it is slowly lumbering to its death. As the Man and the Boy sleep in the woods at night, tremors run through the ground, and the dead trees snap and crash in the darkness all around them. The earth literally sounds its death knell to them at night; one that plays in conjunction with the Man's rapidly declining health. I read the above passage as an expression of sublime terror. To call back to my discussion of the Sublime in my introductory chapter, Terry

Eagleton defines the Sublime as: "any power which is perilous, shattering, ravishing, traumatic, excessive, exhilarating, dwarfing, astonishing, uncontainable, overwhelming, boundless, obscure, terrifying, enthralling and uplifting" (44). McCarthy's language itself is beautiful—old southern trees breaking off in the darkness and "whump"ing into the soft unmarked snow. That it is also a terrifying sign of the earth's impending death speaks to a volatile balance in the landscape around: It is arresting, as the face of the earth has been removed and remade, but frightening in its significance. McCarthy's world poses a massive existential crisis: How can a dying species in a dying world find meaning in life?

A consequence of the cataclysmic disaster is that normal meaning-making systems are disrupted. By that, I mean that there is no government to organize citizens; indeed, there no longer appear to be nations for citizens to belong to. Religion no longer seems organized, and the Man spends the better part of the book wondering whether God exists, and if he can be blamed for the situation at hand: "...then he just knelt in the ashes. He raised his face to the paling day. Are you there? He whispered. Will I see you at last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh god" (10). Denunciations of God are common in dystopian stories, but this passage is unique for the way the Man's emotions swing back and forth, from questioning God's presence, to damning his existence, to sobbing for him in a last breath. McCarthy creates characters whose relationships to the concept of a deity is nuanced by the destruction that surrounds them wherever they travel.

Perhaps an even more significant meaning-making system for most humans is the family unit, which functions in *The Road* as a refuge for displaced survivors, much as it does in *Children of Men* and *28 Days Later*. Like religion, government and community, McCarthy shows the breakdown of the family amid the apocalyptic landscape in a flashback to a conversation between the Man and the Woman (his wife):

> **[The Man]:** Please.
> **[The Woman]:** Stop it.
> **[The Man]:** I am begging you. I'll do anything.
> **[The Woman]:** Such as what? I should have done it a long time ago. When there were three bullets in the gun instead of two. I was stupid [...] You have two bullets and then what? You can't protect us. You say you would die for us but what good is that? [...] We used to talk about death. We don't any more. Why is that?
> **[The Man]:** I don't know.
> **[The Woman]:** It's because it's here. There's nothing left to talk about.
> **[The Man]:** I wouldn't leave you.
> **[The Woman]:** I don't care. It's meaningless.

This passage emphasizes the decay of family in the wake of this apocalyptic disaster. Where the Man still adheres to the conventions of the nuclear family—professing that he wouldn't leave the family, that he would die to protect them—the Woman wants to end what she sees as a facade: living a life that has no possibility of improving. The family, and in a larger sense life, have become meaningless to her.

The great majority of the book is given over to showing the extent to which the Man will go to protect the Boy from harm, and to shield his mind from as much of the terror of the world as possible; it mirrors the lengths that Theo and Kee travel to directly extricate Kee's child from a violent and paranoid English society in *Children of Men*. The Man constructs a simple system of morals to which the Boy clings. The man tells him that the two of them are "The Good Guys," and because of this, they do not engage in

certain behaviors: They do not eat people. They do not kill when they are not threatened.

They do not steal unless it is clear something has been abandoned or the owner is dead.

This system has evolved with two functions: First, it offers a worldview to the Boy, who

was born some time in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, and who has no firsthand

conception of a world other than the one he walks with the Man. For a child who has his

first sip of a carbonated beverage when the two find a rusted Coke-Cola machine in an

abandoned building, the differences between a soda or a system of morals are not entirely

distinct. They are both relics of a time before his own.

The ethical code which the Man teaches to his Son is but one facet of a larger

process in which the Man invests all meaning in the child. In a middle section of the

novel, the Man and Boy encounter an elderly man walking along the road. After much

prodding from the Boy, they share some of their food with the blind transient, and the

Old Man and the Man talk while the Boy sleeps:

> **[The Old Man]:** When I saw the boy I thought I had died.
> **[The Man]:** You thought he was an angel?
> **[The Old Man]:** I didn't know what he was. I never thought I would see a child. I didn't know that would happen.
> **[The Man]:** What if I said he was a god? (145).

The Man doesn't view the Boy as a god in the sense that he has supernatural powers or an

omnipresent aura. The Man's thinking is loosely existentialist. In a world where he is

completely responsible for everything in life, the Man chooses the Boy as the entity

through which he will make sense of things. Establishing a relationship with the Boy and

protecting the Boy from the dangers of their world gives meaning to his life.

Because the Man invests so much significance in the Boy, the central drama of

the story is whether he would be able to kill the child if necessary—and in a world in

which roving groups of cannibals roam the roads, it may well be necessary. With only

one bullet left in his gun, the man constantly wonders if he would be able to kill his son

to spare him worse pain. Even though he has told himself many times he would be able to

do so, the Man refuses to shoot his child even as The Man is dying as the novel ends. He

tells his son:

> I can't. I can't hold my dead son in my arms. I thought I could but I can't. [...] I
> know. I'm sorry. You have my whole heart. You always did. You're the best guy.
> You always were. If I'm not here, you can still talk to me. You can talk to me and
> I'll talk to you. You'll see. (235)

Fresh from his father's death, the Boy seems to find a family who have been watching

from a distance and tell the Boy he can travel safely with them. Some see the McCarthy

ending on a note of hope in an otherwise bleak novel, where others see him betraying the

tone of much of the book for easy sentimentality at its conclusion. With respect to those

positions, I think they miss the real focus on the novel's ending. In the above passage, the

Man essentially chooses hope over non-believing, even if the evidence for a hopeful

future is almost nonexistent. He tells his son, "Goodness will find the little boy. It always

has. It will again" (135). At that moment, the novel ceases to be truly dystopian, because

its central character makes the existential choice between hope and meaninglessness. In

essence, the Man and his wife come to the same conclusion: that in the world they

inhabit, life is neither good nor meaningful. But where she and a number of other

characters choose to end life in the face of this conclusion, the Man creates meaning in

his son, and chooses to hope that good will find the boy. Based on the world they inhabit,

that hope for a better future may be irrational, but choosing this belief leads to a more rational present, one in which a father cannot be the one to take his only son's life. The hope that The Man finds at the end is threadbare, as is any hope left for the reader. We know almost nothing of the family The Boy joins, and for a novel that has been almost unrelentingly pessimistic, The Boy's sudden good fortune is jarring. But the point, here, is that while the conclusion underscores the thematic significance of small family units in dystopian literature. The relationship between The Man and the Boy is their primary mechanism for survival, and the small moments of intimacy and domesticity that they savor – the language specific to them, the daily routines, the stories they tell one another – are the only way they can make a bleak existence meaningful. McCarthy is signaling that the family unit is not only a survival method in a dystopian world, but also a grounding point for the existential struggle endemic to it. He closes the novel by re-affirming the one reliability in a crisis: families.

Taken together, *Children of Men, 28 Days Later* and *The Road* foreground the ever-growing sense of powerlessness and impending extinction that grows throughout Western culture during the War on Terror decade. In each narrative, scenes of mass destruction and death are followed by the collapse of social systems and whole societies. Survivors are left to protect what remains of their families, or to cobble together family-like units with other survivors. Three narratives covering connected, but distinct kinds of calamity all end with scenes that foreground the value of family: Jim, Selena and Hannah together in a remote cottage; Theo dying quietly in a boat with Kee and her baby; The Man dying and passing his son into the care of another surviving family. This illustrates

that these three stories offer a critical distance from the modern world, within which it can be analyzed, but also a simple solution to the disasters. Cuarón, Boyle and McCarthy imagine complex, tactile dystopian worlds, and then suggest that the hope lost in the destruction of old systems can be rekindled in the preservation or birth of a new, smaller community.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GLOBAL POSTHUMAN: DYSTOPIAN ECOLOGY AND

CORPORATE HEGEMONY

The dystopian landscapes of the previous chapter were firmly rooted in the War

on Terror decade. Cormac McCarthy, Danny Boyle and Alfonso Cauron's texts reflect

cultures of paranoia versed in the language and imagery of terrorism and xenophobia, of

biological agents and urban devastation. Because the zeitgeists of terrorism and war are

predicated on immediacy—imminent destruction and impending threats—the dystopias

imagined by McCarthy and others reflect the same sense of encroaching doom. But as

authors, artists, and the culture at large emerge from the early and mid-2000s, the sense

that the world is on the precipice of annihilation subsides, even as the paranoia and

anxiety of the decade linger. The dual global crises of the 2008 economic collapse and

the 2008-2009 world food shortage mark a transition in the cultural imaginary and in the

dystopian fiction born out of it. Texts move from narratives of imminent physical

catastrophe to stories of class conflict, environmental collapse and posthuman evolution.

The most contemporary dystopian texts, produced from 2008 to the present, foreground

concerns about wealth inequality and power, and the role of corporations in biological

and environmental development. In this chapter, I look to fiction infused with the

apprehension and fear of the early and mid-2000s, but which looks forward to concerns

about humanity's ability to sustain and inhabit the planet in the shadow of global

94

corporate power. Paolo Bacigalupi's Nebula and Hugo Award-winning novel *The Windup Girl* focuses on a future version of Thailand excoriated by climate challenges and battling massive agricultural companies that have farmed much of the world's food supply to extinction. Meanwhile, the *BioShock* game series, specifically *BioShock* and *BioShock Infinite*, imagine alternate American histories in which toxic corporations battle with or supersede equally corrupt governments. Backlit by theories of posthumanism, both the novel and the games feature characters whose transhuman nature allows them to destabilize toxic corporate and government-controlled spaces.

In her book *Decade of Fear: Reporting from Terrorism's Grey Zone*, *Toronto Star* National Security Correspondent Michelle Sheppard recalls sitting across from former CIA Director Porter Goss and former NSA Chief Michael Hayden, as the two men were "justifying the water boarding of self-professed 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed […] using salted bar nuts as a prop" (1). The bizarre scene occurred in November 2010 aboard a "Spy Cruise" boat trip, a tourism package sponsored by the Centre for Counterintelligence and Security Studies, a conservative-leaning think tank. The cruise featured lectures and one-on-one conversation opportunities with retired counterintelligence officials, and was created by former CIA Operations Officer Bart Bechtel, "a true red-white-and-blue-bleeding patriot who worries that Americans may forget the horror of 9/11 and become complacent in their security fears" (2). That a former CIA officer would charter a cruise combining exotic Caribbean sights and lectures from retired NSA, CIA and FBI higher-ups is profoundly odd, but also underscores the

slippage of terrorism and national security concerns from the forefront of popular

imagination by 2010.

Five years earlier in 2005—at the height of the Iraq War and just four years

removed from the September 11th attacks—it would have seemed inconceivable that

security officials would worry about Americans becoming "complacent in their security

fears." But by 2010, the national and global preoccupation had shifted dramatically.

Americans had not forgotten the threat of terrorism, but security concerns had been

removed from the most prominent place on the cultural mantle. In 2004, the Pew

Research Center reported that 89% of Americans were in favor of the U.S.-led global

War on Terror. At the end of 2004, even as the initial success of the Iraq War was giving

way to occupation and insurgency, support for the War on Terror remained high, with

81% of Americans in support of the war and identifying it as an important national issue.

Terrorism was seen as important not only to national security, but to the economy as

well. A 2004 poll by the National Association for Business Economics revealed that 40%

of its 117 member panel identified terrorism as the biggest threat to the U.S. economy, far

ahead of the 23% that identified the federal deficit as a larger threat.[1] However, by

January of 2008, the number of Americans who identified terrorism as their top voting

priority had dipped to 74%. And that number continued to decline; by the 2012 election,

just 60% of voters told Pew that terrorism was "very important" to their vote (and this

was a poll that skewed along political lines, though not as starkly as one might expect:

68% of likely Romney voters said terrorism was "very important" to their vote, compared

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[1]Though it should be noted that by 2005, the numbers had nearly flipped for NABE members, with more identifying the deficit as the biggest risk to the U.S. economy. Budgets and terrorism remained the top polling issues until the global financial collapse in 2008.

to only 55% of likely Obama voters). In a March 2013 Gallup poll, a scant 34% identified

a possible future terrorist attack as a major national concern.

Terrorism and warfare faded from the preeminent spot in our cultural

consciousness even as a myriad of politicians and statesmen worked diligently to

convince the public of its impending annihilation. From a March 2012 *Foreign Policy*

feature by Micah Zenko and Michael A. Cohen:

> Last August, the Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney performed what
> has become a quadrennial rite of passage in American presidential politics: he
> delivered a speech to the annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. His
> message was rooted in another grand American tradition: hyping foreign threats
> to the United States. It is "wishful thinking," Romney declared, "that the world is
> becoming a safer place. The opposite is true. Consider simply the jihadists, a near-
> nuclear Iran, a turbulent Middle East, an unstable Pakistan, a delusional North
> Korea, an assertive Russia, and an emerging global power called China. No, the
> world is not becoming safer.[2]

Romney's speech—one among a litany of public statements from Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and others—was both a play to a

sympathetic audience filled with veterans, and an acknowledgement of the muted

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[2]The thrust of Zenko and Cohen's piece is that contrary to the popular political narrative, the global security landscape is far more secure than it seems:

> The world that the United States inhabits today is a remarkably safe and secure place. It is a world
> with fewer violent conflicts and greater political freedom than at virtually any other point in
> human history. All over the world, people enjoy longer life expectancy and greater economic
> opportunity than ever before. The United States faces no plausible existential threats, no great-
> power rival, and no near-term competition for the role of global hegemon. (2)

In just the three years since this piece's publication, war has broken out between Ukraine and Russian-
backed separatists in Crimea, the Syrian Civil War birthed the fundamentalist state ISIS, and terror groups
Al-Shabab and Boko Haram have launched violent public attacks East to West across the African
continent. These events clearly undermine the picture of broad international stability that Zenko and Cohen
wish to paint. Whether this swell in state war and subaltern terrorism will define the latter part of the
decade as much as wealth inequality and corporate power has the first part remains to be seen (though it
certainly feels like it will at the moment), but the point here is just how forcefully Mitt Romney and other
prominent politicians felt they needed to sell the concept of foreign danger to a nation that, at the time, was
entirely preoccupied with its economy.

response voters gave to foreign threats during the 2012 election season. In fact, just three weeks after Romney's appearance at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention, the prevailing anxiety and financial frustration coalesced into the first Occupy Wall Street protests throughout Manhattan's Zuccotti Park and Financial District. My sense is that the national opinion of the Occupy protests, now more than three years past their peak popularity, is one of ambivalence. Media coverage of the movement focused heavily on its lack of hierarchy or leadership, and its refusal to articulate a clear set of demands. In November 2011, even the progressive-leaning polling organization Public Policy Polling reported that only 33% of voters held a favorable view of the Occupy campaigns.

Even if the protests never culminated in meaningful political appeal, they are nonetheless significant for their international context: a constellation of global protests against wealth inequality in the global financial system. In Reykjavík in 2009, thousands of citizens protested and rioted after Iceland's three largest private banks collapsed under the weight of massive foreign debt, plunging the entire national economy into near-bankruptcy ("Cracks in the Crust"). Massive anti-austerity protests swept through Greece beginning in 2010, rallying against the coming debt austerity deal with a domineering European Union. In the protests, Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou was "portrayed as a capitalist stooge" (Hewitt). A series of similar protests in Spain earlier in 2011 precede the Occupy movement (Rainsford). Taken together, the protests and riots speak to the anxiety and anger directed at two common targets: the private banking system, and corporate wealth and influence. Pulitzer Prize-winner Chris Hedges argues

that the protests and Occupy movements underscore a rapidly growing fear of corporate

hegemony:

> We must develop a revolutionary theory that is not reliant on the industrial or agrarian muscle of workers. Most manufacturing jobs have disappeared, and, of those that remain, few are unionized. Our family farms have been destroyed by agro-businesses. Monsanto and its Faustian counterparts on Wall Street rule. They are steadily poisoning our lives and rendering us powerless. The corporate leviathan, which is global, is freed from the constraints of a single nation-state or government. Corporations are beyond regulation or control. Politicians are too anemic, or more often too corrupt, to stand in the way of the accelerating corporate destruction. ("The Sparks of Rebellion")

The absence of accountability is Hedges' central point. By their very global nature,

corporations operate outside the laws and oversight of any one nation or state. And

beyond their unlimited power, National Magazine Award-winner Matt Tiabbi insists that

corporate culture foments a sense of public alienation: "If you think of it this way,

Occupy Wall Street takes on another meaning. There's no better symbol of the gloom and

psychological repression of modern America than the banking system, a huge heartless

machine that attaches itself to you at an early age, and from which there is no escape"

("How I Learned to Stop Worrying…").

In this chapter, I work through the manner in which artists working in the

dystopian genre fictionalize this anti-corporate zeitgeist that is so suspicious of public and

private systems of wealth and power, looking specifically to the novel *The Windup Girl*

and the videogame series *BioShock*. Both texts brim with fear and anxiety over corporate

power, and make overt references to the 2008 financial collapse and the 2008 world food

shortage. In my introductory chapter, I wrote, "Dystopian fear, on the other hand,

examines the partial or complete loss of such faiths, and a dystopian community is one

suffering under both the consequences of failed utopian policies, and an evaporating sense of belief in any ability to progress or improve" (Peters 21). The pervading sense that corporate systems of authority and wealth are anti-utopian and all-controlling animates these stories. My argument is that the authors of these texts look for spaces and forces within their fiction to imagine agency and resistance to the dystopian climate. *The Windup Girl* and the *BioShock* series find a redemptive figure in the cyborg, whose posthuman identity challenges and subvert structures of power and money in subaltern ways.

Hedges and Tiabbi are squarely focused on the impact that corporations have on people disaffected by their omnipotence: our sense of fear or alienation. I think it is important to remember that landscape and ecology are significant features of dystopian story-telling as well. A key example is the barren, ashen world of *The Road* (2006) that I examined in the previous chapter. Equally vivid is the scene in *The Matrix* (1999) in which the real world—a sunless, fulminating cadaver planet ruled by intelligent machines—is shown to Neo, his late Twentieth Century life revealed as nothing more than a computer simulation. Or Katsuhiro Otomo's seminal anime *AKIRA* (1988), which envisions a cyberpunk Tokyo rebuilt after world war on an abandoned landfill. Landscape and ecology are particularly important to stories of dystopian corporations because the fear at play is the concern that corporate excesses poison the collective well, figuratively and literally.

Authoritarian corporations and biological modification are tropes linked through the history of dystopian writing: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) envisions a

future America run entirely by corporations who have experimented with human-animal gene splicing; William Gibson's *Neuromancer (1984)* is a cyber-punk satire on technological corporations; Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner (1982)*—itself an adaptation of Phillip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep (1968)*—describes a dystopian Los Angeles in which powerful corporations use genetic human replicants for illegal work. Going back as far as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, which depicts a near-prophetic *Maschinenmensch* ("machine-human") in a massive city controlled by industrialists, posthuman characters and hegemonic corporations are interwoven. The presence of post-human characters and corporations in very recent dystopian stories is simultaneously another iteration of this canonical trope, and a validation of Chris Hedges' commentary about corporations: They frighten us because they have near limitless resources and are not accountable to the public in the way individuals or the government is imagined to be.

The term posthuman has been used to describe a range of critical theories about human evolution, humanist philosophy, and the intersection of biology and technology. In this chapter, I use the term to describe characters who have evolved or been engineered to biologically interact with industrial or artificial technology, as well fictional cultures and societies attempting to govern or interact with posthuman forces.[3] Unsurprisingly, science fiction and speculative fiction have a special relationship with the posthuman, going at least as far back as H.G. Wells' steampunk classic *The Time Machine*. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* the prototype of modern horror and science fiction, is suffused

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[3]"Posthuman" is the accepted critical term for describing these characters and scenarios; "Transhumanism," a term I don't use in this chapter, refers to a cultural and intellectual movement advocating humans to actively pursue the ability to biologically interact with machines. So I may occasionally refer to a character or trait as being transhuman, but the larger critical discussion of these issues will be referred to as posthuman or posthumanism.

with anxiety about perverse evolution and the engineering of biological life. And Alduos

Huxley's *Brave New World* popularized the concept of the benevolent scientific dystopia,

where humans are engineered and pacified by technology, which inspires later cultural

touchstones like the aforementioned *The Matrix* or Radiohead's *OK Computer* album. I

think it is important to balance an understanding of this early view of the posthuman as a

corrupting force in speculative fiction with contemporary discourses which treat the

posthuman as at least revolutionary, and occasionally utopic.

Katherine Hayles' view of posthumanism is illuminating. She uses the term "to

describe a historical phenomenon, something that occurred in ideas about the human

from roughly the 1930s to the present" that were connected to:

> [C]ommon sites where contestations to determine the future of humanity are
> especially intense. These include issues of globalization as disparate cultures race
> toward informational convergence; performativities that re-define the human
> through mimetic imitation of intelligent machines; and virtual embodiments that
> discipline human users to coordinate their perceptions with algorithmic
> procedures. It is too soon to say where these engagements will end. Perhaps the
> only clear conclusions are that the future of humans will increasingly be entangled
> with intelligent machines, and that embodiments will still matter in some sense,
> however virtual or cyborgian they become. (316)

Hayles outlines three large issues that dominate current posthuman theory: globalization

and an international network of shared knowledge, performances of humanity in

machines, and virtual embodiments of humanity, all of which are increasingly prominent

in a networked world of finance, culture and social media. Nick Bostrom describes the

proliferation of consumer technology as a transformative moment for the posthuman. For

many decades, industry and technology were most visible on grand public scales: in large

transportation systems, world wars and the Space Race. Technological achievement was

a public endeavor, and a source of national pride. When cars, televisions, and later

computers become middle class commodities, Bostrom says, technology adopts a new

status as a class and fashion symbol. More than that, the broad proliferation of personal

technology devices in the last thirty years means that nearly everyone has access to an

interactive digital portal that can feel almost haunted by intelligence:

> In Judaic mysticism, a "golem" refers to an animated being crafted from inanimate material […] With the invention of the electronic computer, the idea of human-like automata graduated from the kindergarten of mythology to the school of science fiction (Asimov, Lem, Clarke) and eventually to the college of technological prediction. (8)

Mark Poster argues that the demarcation between man and intelligent machine

long ago evaporated, only we fail to consistently notice the blurring because it is not

embodied in the way commonly imagined. Rather than the *lusus naturae* of

Frankenstein's monster or a humanoid cyborg, Poster suggests that "networked digital

information humachines"—an umbrella term describing a vast series of digital networks

through which information and culture are exchanged, such as the internet or the global

finance infrastructure—constitute a site that already blurs the natural with the

engineered:

> "Networked digital information humachines" are neither subjects nor objects. The global economy, by contrast, may be understood as the sum of countless human practices in which machines are used as tools, as a myriad of rules, institutions, and habits that to some extent change over time. "Networked digital information humachines" is a phrase that presumes the intertwining of humans and machines to such an extent that properly speaking one cannot locate a position that resembles that of a subject nor that of an object. (318)

In many ways, Poster's theory seems indebted to Appadurai's "scapes" of Modernity in

that they both conceptualize globalization as a series of portals through which goods and

culture pass. The most defining feature of globalization being the *network itself*. In this

case, Poster is concerned exclusively with digital global networks:

> At the heart of *Empire* rests an analysis that derives not from Marx but from
> Foucault and Deleuze. Hardt/Negri narrate the emergence of empire as a change
> in mechanisms of power from societies of discipline to societies of control. The
> thesis that a new mode of political power is coming into being—empire replacing
> the nation state, requires a new mode of social regulation. (326)

It is interesting that Poster, Bostrom, Hayles (and others like Ray Kurzwiel and Marvin

Minsky) focus on a more liminal conceptualization of the posthuman that emphasizes

globalization, information portals, and international data networks. Reflecting our

transnational culture, these theorists adopt an intentionally broad view; the posthuman,

viewed as macro, so to speak. Contemporary dystopian stories featuring posthuman

characters and forces often fall somewhere in between these perspectives, depicting

communities enslaved or monitored by vast networks alongside more typical cyborgian

portrayals of the posthuman.[4] Indeed, there is usefulness in character-driven examinations

of posthumanism. Donna Haraway's formulation of the cyborg is still particularly

appealing for its focus on a single figure who stands in opposition to large networks of

data and authority. Literature and art are, of course, reflections of and meditations on

pervasive national moods. The authors and game-creators of very recent dystopian fiction

merge posthuman theories with the prevailing national and international anxiety

surrounding corporate power and wealth. The vision of a future Thailand in Bacigalupi's

The Windup Girl is predicated on a global crop plague and wars between governments

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[4]To return to a popular example in this chapter, *The Matrix* (2000) depicts a worldwide computer
system – The Matrix itself – meant to mollify and pacify human imagination and resistance to machines. At
the same time, the film uses the Agent Smith character to embody this digital totalitarianism and give its
audience a natural antagonist for the protagonists to battle.

and corporate agricultural giants, while Levine's *BioShock Infinite* responds to the financial protests that sparked the Occupy Wall Street movement. These two texts stake a global view of culture and power. But like so many dystopian texts before them, individual posthuman characters play significant roles in destabilizing the global power systems that Hayles and Poster describe. For the remainder of this chapter, I analyze the figure of the posthuman, first in *The Windup Girl* and then the *BioShock* series. The function of the posthuman in these dystopian stories is rooted directly in the cultural shift I have detailed earlier from the War on Terror decade to the post-recession climate of corporate fear.

Haraway's imagining of the cyborg figure in *A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s* (1985) is seminal in this analysis because it predicts the critical function of cyborg and transhuman characters in contemporary dystopian work. Cyborg is an umbrella term for Cybernetic Organism, or any entity that has both technological and organic parts. Haraway called the cyborg "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (7). In many stories, the cyborg character is a humanoid, sometimes publically known to be robotic, and sometimes passing as human. Darth Vader and Robocop, for example, present a humanoid appearance, but are still distinguishable as robotic or biomechanical. Meanwhile, the T-800 character in the *Terminator* series and the replicants of *Blade Runner* are able to pass through human society largely undetected and unnoticed. In fact, it is precisely the anxiety that a cyborg is capable of "passing" as human that informs many depictions of

the cyborg as a dangerous, subaltern entity unless it is destroyed or until it experiences an epiphany about the implicit uniqueness of organic human life.

Haraway's cyborg is certainly subaltern, but positioned as a revolutionary, non-insidious figure. Written in early-Reagan America, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* (1985) is a socialist-feminist response to an era of American politics not so dissimilar to the present: a period of exploding wealth and corporate expansion, deregulation and recession. The culture of capitalism, says Haraway, forces the world into a series of binaries and competitors: "In the traditions of "Western" science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominated capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the production of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other—the relation between organism and machine has been a border war" (8). Since capitalism forces people into competition, she reasons, culture begins to reflect on this oppositional stance. People living in under this system are separated into clear categories of race, gender and class, and those who do not fit clearly into a category are marginalized or punished. I think the most useful portion of *A Manifesto for Cyborgs* is Haraway's contention that it is untenable, politically or personally, to either fully engage in a culture that is patriarchal, consumption-oriented and antagonistic or to be completely autonomous from it:

> The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the experience of domination, which gives lie to the autonomy of the self. To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many. (35)

Haraway is searching for a figure that can disrupt the either/or binaries of the world, one

that is neither entirely socially constructed nor willfully isolated from the culture it exists

within. Klaus Benesch argues that:

> The machine, especially in its cybernetic representations in modern art, thus has come to function as the cultural Other of technological society. Only by using the symbolic complexity of the cyborg figure as a foil onto which we project both the desire to improve our biological condition, that is to become more machine-like, and, at the same time, the anxiety about machines replacing the human body altogether, are we able to negotiate the increasing technologizing of the modern world. (381)

Benesch's cyborg is a transitional figure, a both/and, whose very being reflects

humanity's desire to better-engineer the species without simultaneously creating its own

replacement. Benesch, too, sees the cybernetic creature as being able to inhabit binaries.

But rather than serve solely as a mirror to contradictory human desires and fears,

Haraway's cyborg is an active, often transgressive figure that is either one, which is too

few, or two, which are too many.

Future Ecologies in *The Windup Girl*

Haraway's theory is predicated on mass culture having been dissected and

compartmentalized into the false binaries of a capitalist system. Bacigalupi's *The Windup

Girl*, presents a vision of a world excoriated by binary systems: global corporations

versus national governments; natural biology versus genetic enhancement; and progress

versus fundamentalism. *The Windup Girl*, which won both the 2010 Nebula and Hugo

Awards for Best Novel, is set in a vision of Thailand in the 23rd Century. This Thailand is

simultaneously the trading post and warring ground for a host of international forces.

Thai, Japanese, Pakistani and American characters representing corporations,

governments and tradesmen intersect across Bangkok at all levels of power. But transnational though it may be, the Thai kingdom is not emblematic of the mythology of 20th and 21st Century globalization: a narrative of growth, travel and expansion. Two hundred years later, Bacigalupi envisions the world in a state of contraction. Massive agricultural corporations call Agrigen and PurCal war over production of a dwindling global food supply. Bio-modified foods have almost entirely replaced organic food stocks, and crop blight has destroyed even many of these engineered crops. Global warming has tripled the swell of the oceans, and Bangkok now sits below sea level, protected by a series of locks and levees built around the city. Thailand has a natural seed bank, kept hidden from the giant calorie companies that are desperate to mine its stock and open up Thailand's restrictive trade tariffs to Western corporations.

That crop shortages and corporate malfeasance inspire this story is not surprising, given the state of the world as Bacigalupi wrote. From 2005-2009, a series of major food shortages – caused both by crop blight and poor climate conditions for harvest – spread across the world and resulted in riots in Eygpt, Haiti, Mozambique, Bangladesh and elsewhere. The riots toppled the government in Haiti, and were "the world's big story," according to the Director of Columbia University's Earth Center. *National Geographic* notes that:

> Between 2005 and the summer of 2008, the price of wheat and corn tripled, and the price of rice climbed fivefold, spurring food riots in nearly two dozen countries and pushing 75 million more people into poverty. But unlike previous shocks driven by short-term food shortages, this price spike came in a year when the world's farmers reaped a record grain crop. […] Simply put: For most of the past decade, the world has been consuming more food than it has been producing.

Global protests against multinational agricultural business like Monsanto spread through

several continents, as many in the public blamed big agribusinesses and their farming

practices for the food shortages. And in the years since the book's publication, food

scientists at the United Nations and the World Food Bank have warned that a crop blight

called Wheat Rust could destroy the global wheat crop and plunge millions deeper into

food insecurity (Chamy). Bacigalupi was certainly aware of these protests and shortages,

and has said in interviews that the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico became an important

way of thinking about corporate influence over a globalized world as he wrote *The*

Windup Girl:

> When you look at something like BP, it's a storyline that shouldn't have existed.
> They couldn't see that the step-by-step actions were gonna cascade into something
> much bigger than themselves. I feel like that really applies to almost all of our
> environmental problems. I get on an airplane and fly out here to Boston — that
> has consequences bigger and more complex than I can understand. The BP thing
> — in the assumed storyline, we're going to drill down, we're going to get some
> oil, and everybody's going to make some money — suddenly becomes something
> else, the storyline veers off completely. And that moment where the story veers
> off and you realize we didn't actually understand our own story, that's what's
> fascinating.

The fear of corporate power is an expression of anxiety over that realization he describes

of not knowing our own story. In these recent corporate dystopias, production and

consumption are encouraged at breakneck speed, trampling the natural world and the

climate as everything expands until whole human populations are forced to contract when

resources are depleted. As Bacigalupi said in a separate interview:

> It all feels as though there's something going on in the zeitgeist and because of it,
> the themes in *The Windup Girl* resonate with people […] global warming and
> [genetically modified] foods apparently resonate strongly, as, I think, does a
> certain unease over where we're headed in terms of our wealth and prosperity.

The story is told from multiple perspectives, though most frequently in the voice of Anderson Lake, ostensibly a manager at a giant kink-spring plant, but actually a corporate spy for AgriGen trying to locate the seed bank. Everywhere Anderson looks, he sees the contracting of the world:

> The world truly is shrinking again. A few dirigible and clipper rides and Anderson clatters through darkened streets on the far side of the planet. It's astounding. In his grandparents' time, even the commute between an old Expansion suburb and a city center was impossible. His grandparents used to tell stories of exploring abandoned suburbs, scavenging for scrap and leavings of whole sprawling neighborhoods that were destroyed in the petroleum Contraction. (114-115)

There is an important distinction to be made here. Many writers describe the process of globalization as shrinking of the world – of knitting disparate places together through travel and technology. Maxwell Garnett, Secretary of the League of Nations, famously said that in 1924, New York was effectively closer to London than Scotland was to it one hundred years earlier. That is, that technologies of travel had made the world a smaller place. And there is some of that sentiment in the quote above; but when Bacigalupi writes about a "Contraction," he doesn't just mean "the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole," to use Roland Robertson's famous phrase. Instead, he is describing a world wracked by over-consumption and overuse of its resources and people. The world is shrinking in this novel because it cannot sustain the lives of its inhabitants anymore.

The binaries that Haraway sees in the world are immediately evident in *The Windup Girl*, as a constellation of oppositional powers joust for control over the Thai kingdom and its remaining natural resources. Working with Anderson and the agribusinesses is Trade Minister Akkarat, who wishes to sell the seedbank and open the

kingdom to heavy Western trade. On the other side, General Pracha runs the Environment

Ministry and enforces the kingdom's strict environmental laws and tariffs with the help

of Jaidee Rojjanasukchai, Captain of the Environment Ministry's armed enforcement

militia. Finally, as Thailand is still ostensibly a monarchy, the Somdet Chaopraya is the

Regent to the child Queen and the most powerful person in Bangkok. These men stand in

for historical forces working fervently to ensure their control over the post-Expansion

globe. Anderson represents corporate hegemony, and the plundering of the world'

resources. It's no surprise that everyone in the Thai kingdom, even allies like Akkarat,

views Anderson, PurCal and AgriGen not as titans of industry, but as bioterrorists and

capitalist overlords: they are the future robber barons, over-harvesting the world. And

while they try to present themselves as progressive agents for a globalized world,

Anderson describes numerous instances in which calorie company farming and food

engineering led to food shortages and massive riots: Meanwhile, General Pracha and

Jaidee lean heavily on the mythology of Bangkok as a holy city and the monarchy as holy

institution. They see themselves as standing up against a tide of corporate hegemony,

even if it is a losing battle:

> But it hurts. They hunt and beg for scraps of knowledge from abroad, scavenge like cheshires for survival. So much knowledge sits inside the Midwestern Compact. When a promising genetic thinker arises somewhere in the world, they are cowed and bullied and bribed to work   with the other best and brightest in Des Moines or Changsha. It takes a strong researcher to resist a PurCal or AgriGen or RedStar […But] we are alive. We are alive when whole kingdoms and countries are gone. When Malaya is a morass of killing. When Kowloon is underwater. When China is split and the Vietnamese are broken and Burma is nothing but starvation. (214)

Anderson, AgriGen and PurCal argue throughout the novel that the Thai Kingdom is

anachronistic: fervently guarding its identity as a protectionist nation while the rest of the

world has opened itself to some cosmopolitan ideal of culture and trade. Geeta Kapur

theorizes that, "From where I speak there is still ground for debate about the nation-state.

With all the calumny it has earned, it may be the only political structure that can protect

the people of the third world from the totalitarian system that oligopolies establish –

ironically, through the massive state power of the advanced nations" (193). Pracha,

Jaidee and others view Bangkok as the last refuge from corporate oligopoly. As *The*

Windup Girl proceeds, these tense binary forces create a rift in the Thai Kingdom. The

relationship between the advanced and original – between engineered calorie substitutes

and a natural seed bank; between global capital forces and tribal extremists; between

monarchy and transnational corporations; between a dying human race and the cyborgs it

constructs—is the gyre that widens and widens. The gap between the forces of expansion

and contraction chew up the center.

Andrew Hageman intelligently argues that *The Windup Girl* dramatizes the

destabilizing of long-standing centers of power. The agriculture conglomerates warring

for food across the globe are headquartered in Iowa, at the heart of what we commonly

call Fly-Over Country:

> Bacigalupi's setting selections displace the usual centers of action and behind-the-
> scenes action-driving centers in what amounts to a re-mapping of post-Expansion
> Earth. On the one hand, placing the corporation driving the action in Des Moines,
> Iowa, charts out a possible techno-future in which agribusiness is far more potent
> than the more traditional centers of finance and/or computer and network
> technologies. On the other hand, Bacigalupi transfers our present day Global
> South from periphery to center of this map by setting the novel in Bangkok. What
> is more, the diegesis unfolds almost exclusively in the factory district and

tenement slums of Bangkok, sites of environmental degradation and danger inside this novel and in our own world today. Thus, *The Windup Girl* is a re-mapping of global capitalism as a dynamic of ecology, economy, and geopolitics. (287)

In other words, Bacigalupi dramatizes the destabilization of the systems of power he describes by focusing on places that might be typically overlooked or sectioned-off from historical seats of power: Fly-over America, a smaller nation on the Indochina Peninsula, the rusted slums of Bangkok. And yet the most aggressive destablizer in the entire novel is, ironically, a cyborg who spends much of the plot being violently abused and controlled. Emiko is a Japanese "Windup," a genetically modified humanoid used as a slave and programmed to obey her owner. Windups, who refer to themselves as New People, are illegal in Thailand, and Emiko is forced to work for a sex club owner (Raleigh) who bribes the police to ignore her presence. Emiko's pores are modified to make her skin particularly smooth and cool to the touch, meaning she overheats easily and must stay inside during the day to avoid the sweltering Thailand climate. For most of the book, her humiliation and abuse is acute, as she is forced to perform degrading shows at the club and to sleep with whomever Raleigh directs her to. At the same time, as the main draw at Bangkok's most famous sex club, she encounters a host of powerful people looking for discreet sex, including the Somdet Chaopraya and Anderson, who becomes obsessed with Emiko and tells her of a secret refuge in Northern Thailand where Windups live free. Raleigh promises Emiko that she can work to buy her freedom and travel to the refuge, but it quickly becomes obvious that he never plans to free her. That realization, coupled with her continued degradation at the club, culminates in a dramatic

scene in which Emiko ignores her programming and kills the Somdet and his men in the

club:

> Her first is very fast. Raleigh-san's throat is soft. […] By the time Raleigh hits the
> floor, Emiko is already bolting across the room, toward the VIP door and the man
> who hurt her most [Chaopraya]. The man who sits and laughs with his friends and
> thinks nothing of the pain he inflicts. She slams into the door. Men look up with
> surprise. Heads turn, mouths open to cry out. The bodyguards are reaching for
> their spring guns, but all of them are moving too slow. None of them are New
> People. (279)

The slaughter at Raleigh's club sets the final third of the plot into motion. Akkarat

assumes that Anderson snuck a military-grade Windup into Thailand to initiate a coup.

General Pracha believes that Akkarat killed the Somdet in a bid to take over the country

and open it to Western trade. Anderson refuses to believe that Emiko, programmed to be

deferential and demure, is even capable of killing eight men. But the slaughter awakens

new powers in Emiko – or rather, allows her to finally see the power she always had –

and she slips into the city at night with newfound strength, speed and confidence. The

cyborg comes to represent a new, subaltern power in Thailand. In so many ways,

Bacigalupi portrays Bangkok as a living entity. Even the characters who mythologize the

city as a holy city of souls seem to recognize it as a place that can almost actualize its

teeming personalities: the streets and peoples, ports and temples coalesce to create a force

that can seemingly swallow up the very men who seek to rule it. Once Emiko lashes out,

she becomes an extension of the city, moving throughout Bangkok organically even as

the streets are brimming with men who seek to destroy her:

> She turns back and smiles at him, seems about to say something, but instead she
> plunges over the balcony's edge and disappears into the blackness […] Below,
> there is nothing. No person, no scream, no thud, no complaints from the streets as

she splatters across the ground. Nothing. Only emptiness. As though the night had swallowed her completely. (269)

Emiko moves seamlessly throughout the city because, as Haraway argues, the cyborg's power lies in its liminal nature. If one is too few, and two is too many, the cyborg exists somewhere in between. She glides through the night streets with ease because portals and passageways, spaces of transition between typical locuses of power and authority, are the in-between spaces she has always occupied. In the power vacuum after the Somdet's death, Anderson and Akkarat launch a coup and defeat General Pracha's environmental militia. The novel ends on the day Akkarat and Anderson formally take control of the country, when Pracha's Captain, Kanya, blows up the levees, preferring to flood Bangkok than give it over to foreign control. Emiko, quite literally, is the force that destabilizes the country and initiates a series of coups and revolutions. Haraway says

> [The Cyborg] is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. (9)

As Haraway envisions it, the cyborg is a non-essential metaphorical figure that disrupts hierarchies of power by destabilizing established binaries. Emiko is the embodiment of that figure.

The *BioShock* Series and the Posthuman Illusion of Choice

In my introduction, I argued that utopian and dystopian theories and stories are not just elements along a spectrum; they are direct antipathies, linked by their constant analysis and appraisal of the other. The threadbare symbiosis between these constructions of utopia and dystopia is made especially clear in Ken Levine's *BioShock* game series,

which is both phenomenally popular and critically-lauded. The series incorporates the

original *BioShock* (2007), *BioShock 2* (2010), Levine's opus *BioShock Infinite* (2013),

and the downloadable extra *BioShock Infinite: Burial At Sea* (2014), which combined

have sold over 16 million copies.[5] In this chapter, I am only focusing on *BioShock* and

BioShock Infinite, which are the most popular and dissected games in the larger series

and received critical plaudits to match their tidal wave of sales: The British Academy of

Film and Television Arts named the original *BioShock* its Game of the Year in 2008, an

award the game also received from *Game Informer* and *X-Play*. *BioShock Infinite* is even

more applauded; it received Game of the Year awards from The Associated Press, CNN

and *EGM*, and was included on a staggering amount of other best-of-2013 lists[6] honoring

everything from its gameplay, to its animation, to the voice work of its actors.

The beating heart of each game is a city built to represent the singular utopian

vision of its founder—and, in the broader thematic strokes of the game, implicit

criticisms of American Exceptionalism and rampant capitalism. The original *BioShock* is

set in the underwater city of Rapture in an alternate 1960:

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[5]And because games are so easily (and illegally) copied and shared, the actual number of game units floating around in public is likely much higher than 16 million.

[6]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_accolades_received_by_BioShock_Infinite#Awards_and_no minations

Figure 8. Screencapture of Rapture

Founded in 1940 deep in the Atlantic sea, Rapture was intended to be an oasis for the elite businessmen, inventors and thinkers believed to be stifled by government overreach and is an imagined embodiment of Objectivist philosophies. Even the name of its founder, business overlord Andrew Ryan, is a nod to Ayn Rand and her many Objectivist novels. The player navigates the game as the protagonist Jack, the sole survivor of an Atlantic plane crash. Jack swims to a Lighthouse that gives him access to Rapture. By Jack's arrival in 1960, Ryan's objectivist paradise has been leveled by more than a decade of rebellion and class war, and its utopian premise has given way to deterioration. Propaganda videos depicting the history and construction of Rapture as a neoliberal paradise are set against a crumbling infrastructure through which the ocean is constantly seeping in. Thijs van den Berg suggests that "[W]ater is persistently reminding the player of the fact that Rapture's structure is failing. More than anything, Rapture's physical breakdown seems to be indicative of the city's inability to maintain the purity of its ideology" (11). Rapture is supposed to be set apart from a world in which state control has stifled innovation and progress, so much so that it was built underwater. And yet the

outside world is constantly seeping in, gallons at a time. Jack is contacted by Atlas, a

man claiming to lead an underclass rebellion against Ryan's authority, and recruited into

the fight against the corporate power that controls the city.

The game is set in a city built and nearly destroyed between 1940-1960 to evoke

the style and zeitgeist of the post-WWII years, and the massive expansion of the

American economy and military across the globe that accompanied it. Levine intends for

his audience, for at least most of the game, to assume the mental pose of rebellion against

the status quo (a mindset we are already conditioned to associate with the 1960s). But

even if it is meant to echo a past that the player is very familiar with, *BioShock* performs

the defamiliarization central to dystopian fiction in its introduction of technologies that

would be considered incredibly advanced today, never mind the years during and after

WWII. The fact that Rapture exists underwater is the first of many signs that this is a

technologically advanced alternate history. Lars Schmeink has argued in "Dystopia,

Alternate History and the Posthuman in *BioShock"* that alternate histories, particularly

those that describe a utopian or dystopian world, serve as a way to rhetorically define

events from the past while–given the technological advances given to so many alternate

history narratives—offering a picture of a possible future. Given this construction,

Rapture investigates the origins of American neoliberalism while giving the player a

dystopian picture of what a future based entirely around laissez-faire capitalism and

rational self-interest might devolve into. And as I will discuss in more detail later in this

chapter, the game itself enacts this critical defamiliarization in the very gameplay. The

player experiences the story and the world of Columbia almost entirely through Booker's

perspective. Critics evaluate games, particularly first person shooters, on many metrics,

including the player's sense of control and autonomy, where the overlapping of player

and character is made as seamless as possible. *BioShock Infinite* has been praised for its

expansive, open-world concept, in which Booker can run, climb, manipulate reality, and

attach to a series of rails that allow him and Elizabeth to move horizontally and vertically

throughout Columbia (McCaffrey). But even given that, there's an inherent distance

between the player and Booker: *you* are not experiencing the world; you are experiencing

the world as a designed character and operate entirely within the limitations of that

avatar. As the game progresses, the game makes those limitations more stark and

questions of free will, autonomy and agency are foregrounded.

To fight Jack and Atlas, Andrew Ryan has compiled a force of genetically

modified plasmid-collecting girls called the Little Sisters and their biologically enhanced

protectors, Big Daddies. A Big Daddy is genetically grafted into massive iron sea diving

suits, and outfitted with a drill, a laser and a rivet gun. The Little Sisters collect ADAM, a

plasmid they harvest from the dead bodies littered around Rapture that gives its user

advanced genetic powers. As Jack, the player has the option of attacking the Big Daddies

and harvesting the plasmid from a Little Sister. At the game's end, the player-Jack is

revealed to be Andrew Ryan's son while Atlas is unmasked as Frank Fontaine (a slippage

of *Fountainhead*, yet another Ayn Rand reference), a gangster who wants to take over

Rapture and engineer even more profit from its plasmid factories. Fontaine has been

using a genetic code within Jack activated by the phrase *Would you kindly?*, which

Atlas/Fontaine uses throughout the game to induce Jack to kill his father. As the game ends, Fontaine is finally swarmed and killed by Little Sisters.

Levine views a world ruled by corporate interests as bleakly as Bacigalupi in *The Windup Girl*. The fundamental problem of Rapture is that the same objectivist ideals the city was built to embody and protect are eating the population alive from the inside out. Carried through the gameplay to their most extreme conclusion, objectivist values of free market capitalism, self-interested decision-making and open competition render everyone an object to exploit or an obstacle to overcome in the chase for resources and the mad scramble to stay alive. One of the primary questions the player is forced to confront is whether and how Jack will harvest plasmid from the Little Sisters, who in turn are already harvesting the ADAM plasmid from dead bodies. The game very clearly implies that the endpoint of Andrew Ryan's vision is a world where the less useful (by subjective metric) and the weak are literally stripped and harvested for parts. Bacigalupi focuses on over-harvested landscapes while Levine depicts a Machiavellian factory magnate ala-John Galt, but in both the spectre of the robber baron industrialist towers over corporate-controlled societies.

Levine's view of the posthuman in the original *BioShock* can at first appear ambivalent. Or maybe I should say that the game's vast web of primary and secondary characters encompasses Levine's many views of the posthuman, which shift fluidly between positive and negative. Embodied in the Big Daddies or in Fontaine, the posthuman figure seems aggressive and dangerous—outfitted with industrial tools and the all-consuming will of a corporation. If you cannot defend yourself, you will be killed

or consumed. But when Jack uses a plasmid to give himself superhuman powers to fight a Big Daddy, or discovers that his DNA allows him special access to hidden locations in Rapture, these posthuman enhancements are cast as subversive and used toward heroic ends. In Levine's hands, posthumanity is an elastic trope that augments a character's behavior, positive or negative.

Once the Little Sisters swarm and kill Fontaine, the game's big twist is revealed: the ultimate fate of Jack and Rapture depends on whether the player has harvested the ADAM plasmid from any of the Little Sisters during the course of the game. As Jack, the player has the option of killing the Little Sisters by violently and quickly ripping the plasmid from them, or of 'healing' them by slowly harvesting the plasmid in a long procedure that returns the Little Sister to being a more-or-less normal child. The player can also choose to ignore the Little Sisters. If Jack has healed or ignored all of the Little Sisters, five of them follow Jack to the surface, where they live together as a family until Jack's death. If the player has violently harvested even one Little Sister, however, Jack becomes an even more barbaric titan than his father, unleashing the powers of Rapture on the surface world and stealing a nuclear arsenal. Coupled with the earlier revelation that Fontaine had conditioned Jack's memories and behavior almost from birth, and primed Jack with the *Would you kindly*? command, the game's thematic preoccupation with freewill in a corporate dystopia is made obvious.

Ostensibly, free will is the fundamental concept around which Rapture is conceived; a sanctuary away from society's exploitation of individual genius animated by personal ambition and the invisible hand. As he is being killed, Andrew Ryan repeatedly

proclaims, "A man chooses, a slave obeys." Ryan chooses to enact his own death in a

final performance of what he desperately wants to perceive as his own free will.

BioShock itself is deeply cynical of free will, which is portrayed as illusory, and

suspicious of systems that claim to be free and anti-authoritarian. Tim Welsh has argued

that video games themselves offer an illusion of agency to players that the programming
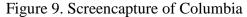
of the medium has yet to transcend:

> Video games often seduce their players with fantasies of agency and power, the
> chance to play as super-human heroes set against evil, injustice, and oppression.
> Yet, the one power gaming can never offer its player fully is self-determination.
> Despite overtures of customization, open-world environments, and all variety of
> choice, the gamer is always caught between gamic action and algorithmic control.
> In this scene, *BioShock* violates the player's implicit trust that the game will tell
> him how to inhabit the (virtual) world and then leave him to play. It strips away
> the illusion of choice. (Welsh)

The game undeniably offers choices to the player, and attaches major consequences to

those choices. Jack is either liberated or damned according to the decision the player

makes in harvesting the Little Sisters. But do we laud the game for giving the player a

larger degree of choice, going so far as to map out very distinct futures that hinge on in-

game choices? Or does the fact that only a few possible endings exist, each imagined and

programmed by a team of writers and developers, only underscore the tension between

gamic action and algorithmic control? As Welsh says, *BioShock's* deception is revealed

in the final scene between Jack and Ryan: While you have made choices along the way

that will augment the plot, the larger turns of the story have been mapped out. What first

appear to be freely made choices is later revealed to be part of Atlas/Fontaine's carefully

mapped plot. At its climax the game suddenly wrestles the illusion of control away from

the player, who cannot even prevent the *Would you Kindly?* command from inducing

Jack to kill Ryan. In a city built to personify free will, the player mostly observes the final moments of the game, preordained by decisions made much earlier.

BioShock Infinite only expands and deepens the original game's interest in free will and agency within crumbling systems. As in the original, *BioShock Infinite* is set in an other-worldly city built as a monument to its founder's towering ego. A dark parallel to Rapture, Columbia is a floating, airborne metropolis commissioned by the U.S. Government to be proudly displayed at the 1893 World's Fair. The city itself models the white, marbled grandeur of the Chicago World's Fair, with its founder, Zachary Comstock, etched at the very center:

Figure 9. Screencapture of Columbia

Columbia, named for an Archangel Comstock claims to have seen in a vision, is meant to embody the concept and era of American Exceptionalism: the floating city could travel from country to country, world's fair to world's fair, highlighting the

superior uniqueness of American life and culture. But in the game's alternate history, Comstock orders Columbia to fire on Beijing during the 1903 Boxer Rebellion, severing an already frayed relationship with the U.S. Government. Columbia secedes from the United States, disappears into the sky, and Comstock casts himself in the image of a prophet who condemns America as "the Sodom below." Comstock reorganizes the culture of Columbia into one that fanatically values purity, righteousness and piety, and which exists primarily as a cult of his personality. Comstock declares his daughter, Elizabeth, the heir to Columbia and the fulfillment of a bizarre succession prophecy, and enflames the city with warnings of a coming "False Shepherd" who will orchestrate the destruction of the city.

BioShock Infinite begins in 1912 when the player arrives as Booker DeWitt, a mercenary former agent of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency. Booker is sent to Columbia through a lighthouse, tasked with rescuing Elizabeth in order to wipe away a debt. Like the objectivist philosophies that buttress Rapture, the pious, Romanesque façade of Columbia hastily deteriorates. Comstock weaves natavist racism and ideologies of white purity and privilege into the fabric of Columbian society, and in the absence of federal labor laws, a non-white underclass of slaves and indentured servants wallow in poverty and abuse while racial propaganda adorns the city:

Figure 10. Screencapture of Columbia

There are many vestiges of a vibrant civil life: museums, gardens and memorials, all styled to match the grandeur of the World's Fair, and each a hotbed of racist dogma, minstrelsy, and embellished history. Columbia's "Hall of Heroes," for example, re-imagines the Battle of Wounded Knee (which Comstock fought in, according to lore) and Columbia's crusade in the Boxer Rebellion as heroic interventions in righteous battles against barbaric people. As the player passes into the Boxer Rebellion exhibit, an animatronic "Patriot" declares "Twas yellow skin and slanted eyes that did betray us with their lies. Until they crossed the righteous path of our Prophets holy wrath." Everything in Columbia is on message; it all works to stoke xenophobia and elitism and unify the paranoia they produce into a slavish devotion to Comstock, who amplifies every stake with the language of prophecy and pledges to protect Columbians from invaders and false shepherds.

The institutional violence and racism celebrated throughout Columbian culture manifests everywhere in its citizens. Only moments after entering Columbia through a Baptismal tunnel and wandering through idyllic city streets, Booker is roped into a street side carnival where the player is encouraged to stone an interracial couple for violating Columbia's strict purity laws.[7] The city descends into destructive chaos when Booker kills a policeman at the carnival and quickly rescues Elizabeth. Together, playing as Booker with Elizabeth as the A.I. companion, the player spends much of the game eluding a number of forces: Comstock's men; a giant mechanical bird called Songbird programmed to protect Elizabeth while also keeping her from ever leaving Columbia; and the Vox Populi, a militant underground rebellion of oppressed-class workers led by Daisy Fitzroy. In Levine's games, the separation between utopian and dystopia is particularly blurry: one man's utopia is built on the exploitation of many; the dystopian rubble of that same utopian city is staging ground for someone's revolution—their hope for something better. The dystopian lurks in the shadows and fault lines of the utopian.

Some discussion of *BioShock Infinite* suggests that the game discards the original *BioShock*'s narrow focus on corporate, capitalistic dystopias for a more expansive look at American culture. In total, *BioShock Infinite* presents a more expansive world in which to roam and questions systems of racism, poverty and dogma with more depth than the first game could even attempt. Still, I argue that the scope of this game is actually a very logical extension of the original game's critiques that have been fine-tuned in light of the worldwide financial collapse and subsequent Wall Street protests happening during the game's development. If there is any figure in Columbia that rivals Comstock for

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[7]Which the game does not allow, of course.

prominence, it is Jeremiah Fink, the city's most powerful industrialist and its wealthiest citizen. Fink owns nearly every patent in Columbia, and almost all of the city's manufacturing is produced at Finktown, a company town built practicing frenetic worker exploitation. Fink built his conglomerate on slave and servant laborers he bought in the United States and transported to Columbia. As with *BioShock*'s depiction of Frank Fontaine, Fink freely blurs the line between businessman and criminal, capitalist and baron. He pays his workers in money that is only redeemable at Fink's company stores; he exploits and abuses the underclass, most of whom live in a shantytown on the lower levels of the city; he savagely busts unions. Fink erects gilded statues of himself throughout Finktown.

And it is here that *BioShock Infinite* deepens the critique Kevin Levine sketched against unregulated capitalism in *BioShock*. Finktown, like Rapture, is a self-indicting horror show of neoliberalism. But more than that, the images of Fink and Comstock—etched in gold and bronze and marble—dominate the Columbia skyline and set up the Capitalist and the Prophet as joint antagonists who loom and leer over the city.[8] They each profit on systems of oppression and exploitation maintained by narratives of fear. In a city originally built to showcase the *exceptional* uniqueness of America, our two largest cultural forces—Big Business and the Church—are presented as poisonous, violent institutions with monomaniacal leaders. Levine imagines a resistance to this in the form of the Vox Populi, who are lead by the increasingly militaristic Daisy Fitzroy. Fitzroy was purchased by Fink as a "Negro convict" in Georgia and brought to Columbia to work

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[8]A symbiosis that has played out in a lot of recent (often dystopian) fiction. P.T. Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007) comes to my mind with its duel between the towering oil man Daniel Plainview and the pre-television evangelist Eli.

for Lady Comstock. When Lady Comstock was murdered, Fitzroy was framed for her

death, fled, and later resurfaced leading the Vox Populi workers rebellion inside

Finktown. Levine has consistently argued that the Vox Populi shouldn't be understood as

solely analogous to the Occupy Wall Street movement. In an interview with the

Washington Post, he says the *BioShock Infinite* writing team researched many historical

examples of student and worker revolutionary groups, including the West German Red

Army Faction (or Baader-Meinhoff Group). In the same interview, Levine admits that he

sees Occupy Wall Street as a descendant of many of these populist rebellions, and even

used the protests to refine conceptualizations of the Vox Populi as the game was delayed

and re-worked several times before its ultimately successful release:

> I've been spending a lot of time watching Occupy Wall Street. The complaint is that they don't have a consistent message. It's been interesting to reflect upon the movement's message, watching it crystallize. You can watch that, and this is a challenge I've had writing [the Vox Populi]. Leftist movements are always less organized. There's a messaging machine on the right, where they'll come up with something and the next day you have 10, 20 people out on the news using those points. Leftist groups tend not to like authority; nobody in them tends to listen to it. So Occupy Wall Street has been helping me because I've been struggling to figure out how the Vox Populi get to the point in the demo.

The exploited workers are disgruntled but disorganized until Fitzroy–and later,

inadvertently, Booker—assumes pivotal roles and gives the Vox Populi leadership a

unifying message. But as it has with Andrew Ryan, Fontaine, Comstock and Fink and

many other characters in the *BioShock* universe, power corrupts strong leaders. Fitzroy

guides the Vox Populi on an increasingly violent mission to kill the Founders and take

control of all of Columbia. Fitzroy slashes Fink's throat, smears his blood across her own

face, and then is killed by Elizabeth before she can also kill Fink's young son.

Although the game is sympathetic to the politics behind the Occupy Movement, it

is suspicious of social movements and dynamic leaders from any background. In *Playing*

at Resistance, Thijs van den Berg argues that *BioShock* attempts to imagine a resistance

to dominate neoliberal ideologies, but invariably fails because a desire to resist the

neoliberal paradigm isn't by itself enough to imagine alternative paradigms:

> While *BioShock* clearly expresses an interest in destroying Rand's extreme
> version of capitalist economy—by showing the moral bankruptcy of "rational
> self-interest," the breakdown of its utopian environment, its decline into class
> struggle, etc.—the game simultaneously has trouble seeing its project through.
> Certainly, *BioShock* is capable of voicing critique on *laissez-faire* economics by
> rendering a dystopian version of Rand's vision. However, the narrative seems to
> be constrained in this respect. It is unable to complete its destructive mission and,
> in spite of itself, continues to make use of the notions of private ownership and
> profit. Both the game's continued reliance on economies of play and its narrative
> denouement express this limit to its imagination. (11)

Van den Berg's argument is that the game cannot truly imagine an end to capitalist

systems of wealth and power when neoliberal ideology is so culturally embedded that the

core concepts are fundamental parts of the game play. When the Vox Populi movement

starts matching the hysteria and violence of Fink and Comstock, *BioShock Infinite*

acknowledges that, historically, it has been almost impossible even for populist

revolutions to imagine or enact change that displaces neoliberal ideology. Perhaps Levine

and the writers are arguing that concepts ripe for abuse–laissez faire Capitalism, rational

self-interest, exceptionalism and moral rectitude—are too fundamentally woven into

American culture to imagine a functional alternative. More significantly, perhaps

BioShock Infinite intimates that its audience—y*ou*, the player—are a significant part of

the problem.

Despite being popular across the globe, it is easy to envision the ideal *BioShock Infinite* player as an American, or someone familiar enough with American culture and history to recognize the critiques Levine offers. I believe *BioShock Infinite* uses the character of Elizabeth to argue that the audience, embodied in the player, is as informed by neoliberal ideologies as the characters, and therefore just as problematic. Elizabeth is the best and most interesting character in *BioShock Infinite* and the *BioShock* series as a whole because she encompasses multitudes and embodies Haraway's concept of the cyborg, a figure missing from the original game despite a bounty of posthuman characters. Elizabeth isn't biomechanical like Emiko in *The Windup Girl*, but she has powers which at first appear almost supernatural. She has the ability to open up what the game calls "tears," or windows into alternate timelines and histories which she and her companions can pass into, or which she can pull things out of and into the timeline she currently inhabits. For most of the game, Elizabeth uses only a very small portion of her powers; the rest have been drained from her using a giant siphon, which powers much of the Columbia's incredible flying technology and keeps Elizabeth from leaving the city. As Booker and Elizabeth run and fight their way through most of Columbia, the interwoven history of the city and the characters is revealed: Booker and Comstock are the same person, only living in alternate realities. In one reality, Booker is so disturbed by his own atrocities at Wounded Knee that he accepts a baptism in a river and is reborn as Zachary Hale Comstock. In another reality, Booker rejects the baptism, becomes a private detective in New York, and has a daughter named Anna, who he sells to pay off his gambling debts. Anna is sold to the Luteces, a twin brother and sister team who

discovered how to travel between parallel universes and who work on Comstock's behalf. In his past, Booker changed his mind almost immediately after selling Anna, and attempts to rescue her as the Luteces pull the girl through a tear in time and deliver her to Comstock, who renames her Elizabeth and anoints her his heir and the fulfillment of his succession prophecy. Comstock is Booker. Anna is Elizabeth. Booker is Elizabeth's father.

In the last quarter of the game, Elizabeth directs and coordinates nearly all the action and momentum; she opens tears, visits Booker in multiple time periods, and destroys the Songbird that held her and Booker captive by opening a tear and sending the three of them to Rapture, where Booker and Elizabeth materialize safely within the city walls and the Songbird is crushed by the weight of the ocean when he materializes outside them. But more than that, Elizabeth becomes a kind of Virgil leading the way and cultivating the player's perspective on the many successive revelations in the game's climax. In a very effortless way, the game finesses Elizabeth's evolution from frightened protectorate to lead protagonist, displacing both Booker and the player as the game's prime mover. Elizabeth is initially divided along the binary of public and private; she is a public figure in Columbia, crucial to the entire prophecy that Comstock has orchestrated, but also buried away in a private tower guarded by the Songbird. The more she becomes aware of the reality of life in Columbia, the more the public façade of her persona crumbles. Elizabeth cannot hide in plain sight like Emiko in that future Thailand, but she is still a kind of subaltern force: she opens tear after tear, exchanging bits of this reality with the next, literally blending together the binaries of time, space and personal history.

More than that, the game explains that Elizabeth obtained her powers when Booker

initially tried to rescue her from the Luteces: the tear in time closed around Elizabeth's

hand, severing the tip of her finger. Elizabeth is very literally a liminal figure: she can

open tears in time because parts of her already exist in multiple realities.

Haraway argues that the cyborg is a both/and entity, who destabilizes patriarchal,

racist and colonial hierarchies, and no matter what timeline Elizabeth tears into, the

player consistently sees Columbia's future as dystopian. Every reality is defined by war

and violence rooted in the patriarchal, colonialist dogma that Comstock brings to

Columbia. Elizabeth takes Booker to a realm of infinite lighthouses, telling him that,

while each lighthouse represents a different timeline, the core components are always the

same: "There will always be man. There will always be a lighthouse. There will always
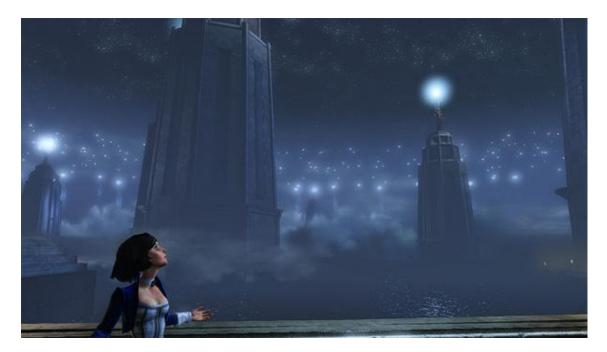
be a city."

Figure 11. Infinite Lighthouses

That is, even if the variables can change infinitely, the defining characteristics of this reality will always be the same. Booker will always be Booker Dewitt, who sells his daughter into slavery and accelerates the mass destruction of Columbia. Or Booker will become Comstock and bring Columbia into existence. As G. Christopher Williams writes:

> Indeed, Elizabeth seems to be defining the BioShock universe, why Rapture exists, why Columbia exists, as variations on constant themes. In Levine's iterations of the BioShock universe, it seems there is indeed always a lighthouse, always a man, always a city.

Booker can never change his future in a way that would make it fundamentally different because he cannot undo his own past.

And yet, I argue the end of the game is revolutionary. Having shown Booker all the ways in which his life invariably bends to a dystopian future, Elizabeth opens a tear and brings Booker back to the river where he was first offered the baptism. Confronted by many iterations of Elizabeth, Booker acquiesces and agrees to be drowned in the river – an action that occurs as a cut scene, removing all control from the player.

Figure 12. Bioshock Infinite

When you look across the many Elizabeth's confronting you in a shallow river the game's message seems laid bare: In a realm of endless lighthouses—literally, limitless choice—the player-protagonist has none. In both games, whether through the figure of Andrew Ryan or Zachary Comstock, whole civilizations are ostensibly built around a pure market ideology of choice and free will. But the premise of choice is consistently invalidated by the end of each game. Williams continues:

> [T]he most naturalistic moment in the game's closing scenes is when Booker, the man standing in for you, the player, declares something that he doesn't listen to where anyone tells him to go, to what anyone tells him to do. Elizabeth's simple response is as devastating as the "Would you kindly?" moment in *BioShock* and more to the point: 'You already have.'

BioShock Infinite carefully shepherds this point: that your sense of control and free will is misplaced. There will always be a curtain pulled to reveal a hidden puppet master or make obvious our powerlessness.

Still, says the game, what you need to counteract this sense of encroaching oppression is a force that can move in and out of these systems of control: the cyborg figure. Because Elizabeth can create tears and move through alternate timelines, she is able to show Booker the realm of infinite lighthouses. Only there can Booker see the infinite repetition of the pattern. And only there can Booker see that the only way to prevent Comstock and Columbia is to drown before the Prophet can be baptized into existence. You could say that Booker chooses to die, but I'd say that is a way to rationalize what is really Booker's only option; he's just been given the chance to embrace it willingly. As if to reinforce the point, the very ending of the game is essentially one long cut scene—completely displacing the player from any notion of

being in control. Only Elizabeth has a modicum of control, which she owes to the fluidity with which she can move through the fabric of time. As Booker dies, she begins to disappear too–his death means Anna, and later Elizabeth, never exist. The cyborg here is the one who finally does make the active choice to die, not to the aggrandizement of an ego, but to end a cycle of violence and destruction by deleting it entirely.

CLOSING REMARKS

When I first started writing this project, I was convinced that the sudden swell in popularity of dystopian texts was very narrowly tied the abundance of images of terrorism onscreen. Indeed, that claim still forms the bedrock of my argument: the September 11th attacks, the 2004 train bombings in Madrid, the 2005 bus bombings in London and other violent in the first half of the new millennium were mass mediated in ways that no other acts of terrorism, to that point, had been. Millions of stories and images—from witnesses, survivors, news cameras and cellphones—instantly flow into the global media, where they form a tapestry of destruction and death that the public constantly relives and renegotiates. In Chapter Three, I quote an essay by Francisco Collado-Rodriguez about Cormac McCarthy's most recent novels, in which he describes popular culture as "structurally traumatized" (81), a phrasing I find productive. The idea is not just that death and destruction are popular topics for fiction; rather, that the imagery of this death and destruction is so vivid and viewed with such repetition that it fundamentally changes our society. Mass destruction—and the looming threat (real, imagined or somewhere in between) of mass extinction—became the imaginative framework of our culture.

While writing, there were dozens of texts and stories I wanted to discuss that ultimately fell outside the focus of my individual chapters, but still reflect our structurally traumatized world. In particular, the impact that our dystopian zeitgeist has had on

superhero films, I think a compelling argument can be made in this manner for

Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, a movie which was nominated for ten Academy

Awards and for which Heath Ledger won a posthumous Oscar. Ledger's Joker, called

one of the best screen villains of all time by the American Film Institute ("100 Greatest

Heroes & Villains), is a subaltern force that destabilizes everything in the film's universe:

he steals money from mob-owned banks, executes police officers and public attorneys,

and ignites bombs around Gotham City. At the time of the film's release, the *New York*

Times editorial board wrote:

> The Joker—who is particularly maniacal and nihilistic in this version of the
> Batman story—is an Osama Bin Laden-style terrorist. He not only engages in
> mass carnage, he aims to damage a free society by instilling fear in the public.
> […] And Batman is something else: a darker response to the terrorist threat. He
> sets up a form of domestic surveillance, using people's cell phones. He uses
> torture to uncover the details of an ongoing plot.

The Joker engages in all of this violence purely for the pleasure of watching the chaos

unfold. He proves nearly impossible to apprehend because he disobeys cinematic and

narrative conventions: he burns all the money he steals so that he cannot be bought. His

scarred face is smeared in clown makeup, so no one has ever really seen his true face.

Every time The Joker describes the origins of his scars, he tells a different story of violent

facial disfigurement, so that either the other characters or the audience know what is true.

The audience never sees where he sleeps, eats or hides. He is an opaque force that drifts

in and out of the shadows to sow anarchy and violence. I think the *New York Times*

editorial is correct that The Joker of *The Dark Knight* embodies the figure of the

contemporary terrorist: disconnected from larger institutions and groups, waging real and

psychological war on a major urban setting. But we can also take the character and his

impact on Gotham City to represent the psychological experience of living under the threat of terrorism: to feel haunted by a force whose face is unknown and whose origins are difficult to scrutinize.

So captivating to audiences was this portrait of a corrupt city beset by an inscrutable terrorist that many other superhero films have tried to copy the dour, dystopic tone of *The Dark Knight*. Even Superman—perhaps the prototype of the charming, upbeat, indestructible superhero figure—is reimagined as a disaffected millennial. Writing about the 2013 film *Man of Steel*, Darren Franich remarks, "The outcast/age of autism overtones are miles removed from the old-fashioned notion of Clark as an All-American football-playing über-kid; likewise, the film's portrayal of a young-adult Clark as a job-hopping wanderer feels tapped into our recessionary age." And Daniel Bettridge adds: "It's not for nothing that *Man of Steel* eschews the series' cinematic tradition in favor of emulating the tone of *The Dark Knight*. It's no longer enough for Superman to save the world; instead, he needs to spend his screen time contemplating his place in it." In *Man of Steel*, Clark Kent can't escape being sucked into the moribund culture of the new millennium. So much so, that the movie ends with an extended battle sequence between Superman and the film's villain, General Zod, that literally destroys half of lower Manhattan. We don't frequently conceptualize Superman as dystopian character, but when he spends most of the movie as an outcast, and the final battle ends in massive death and destruction, it's difficult to see this version of the character in any other light.

I mention *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Man of Steel* not only because I enjoy the superhero genre, but also because they are among a wave of texts that have given me

pause to reconsider whether the popularity of the dystopian genre is still so narrowly

tethered to the War on Terror. As I argued in Chapter Four, even when the preeminent

public preoccupation shifted from terrorism to class, wealth and corporate power after the

2008 global financial collapse, writers and videogame creators still eagerly employed

dystopian tropes. *The Walking Dead* is a grisly, existentially traumatic show about

zombies that also happens to be the most popular cable program of all time, especially

among women (Valenti, 1). Other current shows, like *Black Mirror*, *Continuum, The

Leftovers* and *The Last Man on Earth*, all feature dystopian worlds, but range from action

thrillers, to heavy drama, to comedy. *The Hunger Games* franchise remains exceedingly

popular. In short, our cultural preoccupation with the dystopian remains.

But why and where does it go? I think we need to acknowledge terrorism and war

have recaptured a major portion of our attention, even in a culture that is clearly war-

weary. The emergence of groups like Al-Shabab and Boko Haram in northern Africa, and

the Islamic State's program of terror, war and rape across Syria and Iraq fit so easily into

the lexicon we developed during the initial mania of the War on Terror. Perhaps the

dystopian remains popular because the international community, by and large, remains

plagued by war, terrorism and instability. And yet, I wonder if it won't soon become

obvious that the dystopian has attached itself as a permanent lens through which this

generation—the one that came of age during the War on Terror—views itself and the

world at large. By that, I mean that the way that the dystopian genre has sustained its

critical and general popularity for well more than a decade says to me that the experience

and imagery of widespread terrorism is so intense that it becomes a structural element of

society. That shows like *The Last Man on Earth* (2015) can find comedy in apocalyptic scenarios is a sign that our culture is starting to recognize and reflect on its own fascination with the dystopian.

It is of course difficult to predict where the genre and the field of criticism growing around it will go in the future, but I argue that the posthuman element of the texts analyzed in Chapter Four (*The Windup Girl*, *BioShock* and *BioShock Infinite*) will play a significant role in dystopian stories to come. Already Emmy-nominated shows like *Orphan Black* are telling stories contemplating human cloning, body modifications, and the expansive power of technology corporations. I think dystopian writers rightfully see the posthuman as a force that has the power to destabilize current structures of authority and domination. Indeed, in a recent *Guardian* essay, Paul Mason argues that we are in the beginning stages of the end of capitalism: and that the force bringing about this end is the disruptive digital network of information and culture that we are able to access. More specifically, he argues that access to uninterrupted information and social networks is actively creating a new kind of human being, one more willing to distrust systems of power, abandon past ideas, and *experiment with conceptions of the self*: "But we can see their prefigurative forms in the lives of young people all over the world breaking down 20th-century barriers around sexuality, work, creativity and the self." Questions technology, evolution and the definition of "human" will drive the genre. Ironically, Mason's essay is subtitled "Without us noticing, we are entering into the postcapitalist era. At the heart of further change to come is information technology [...] The old ways

will take a long while to disappear, but it's time to be utopian."[1] Perhaps if old ways

disappear, and if the systems of power and wealth we so distrust are upended, then a

culture that has been so transfixed by dystopian fear will evolve to a more utopian hope

for something better.

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[1]This really is the sub-headline. It's quite long.

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